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THE TIMES,

A NOVEL.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

London :

PRINTED FOR HENRY COLBURN,
ENGLISH AND FOREIGN PUBLIC LIBRARY,
CONDUIT STREET, BOND STREET.

1811,

Richard Tayler and Co., Shoe Lane, London.

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DEDICATION.

TO MRS. HAMILTON.

MADAM,

DID I not hope that some useful instruction might be conveyed through the medium of the following domestic story, I should not have presumed to request that a name so high'y respectable as that which honours this page might be prefixed to it.

Where talents are so universally acknowledged and so justly appreciated as those which you have the happiness to possess, the offer of individual praise must appear superfluous. But whilst I repress the pleasure I should have in avowing my sentiments on a subject where so much celebrity has been obtained

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ained, I cannot wholly forgo the gratification of paying this humble but sincere tribute to those private virtues which form so essential though a less conspicuous part of your character. By those only who are so happy as to be ranked among the number of your friends, can these virtues be fully known, and properly valued.

With every sentiment of gratitude, respect, and admiration, I have the honour to be,

Madam,

Your obedient servant,

THE AUTHOR.

PREFACE.

WHATEVER may be the imperfections of the little narrative which occupies the following pages, the writer humbly hopes it is exempt from those faults which too frequently may be imputed to productions of a nature somewhat similar. Yet she flatters herself it will not be found totally devoid of interest, though destitute of those embellishments which, whilst they dazzle, have a tendency to deceive; give false views of life, and lead the mind to place an undue value on showy and superficial accomplishments.

The

The character of Miss Reynolds is intended to evince the happy and permanent effects of an early attention to religion, even where subsequent circumstances and events have been unfavourable to the performance of its duties, and the retention of its principles. In the conduct of Miss Harwood, whose education in this most essential point had been defective, is exhibited an instance where the union of every moral virtue was found insufficient to secure the possessor from falling a prey to the assaults of temptation: had those virtues been aided by religion, the mind thus fortified would in all human
pro-

probability have retained its innocence amidst the allurements of the world, whatever form they had assumed to sully its purity, and undermine its integrity. But if the want of that genuine and habitual piety which is so necessary for the preservation of virtue, and consequently of happiness, precipitated this unfortunate young person into irretrievable errors ; how great were the consolations she derived from religion, when support and comfort could be obtained from no other source !

Should the perusal of this humble work induce one parent more assiduously to inculcate the principles

ciples of religion, or one child more attentively to imbibe them, the Author will be happy in the reflection of not having written altogether in vain.

THE

THE TIMES.

EARLY in the month of October, in the year 1806, Sir William and Lady Leslie quitted their seat in Berkshire, in order to pay a visit to some friends in the north of England. This visit had long been expected by Mr. Harwood and his family, with whom Lady Leslie had been accustomed to spend much of her time in early life. Various reasons had been assigned for protracting to the period above mentioned the

VOL. I. B performance

performance of a promise which Mr. and Miss Harwood had looked forward to with great pleasure ; but repeated disappointments had led them to fear this pleasure was to consist only in idea.

Lady Leslie was not willing to acknowledge, even to herself, the true reason for having declined complying with the wishes of her friends, as she was sensible that it denoted a turn of mind too volatile, and too frivolous, to render her truly respectable. But certainly this lady attached to the thoughts of the proposed excursion a degree of insipidity and sameness, which discouraged her from engaging in it ; nor were the sentiments of Sir William very dissimilar to her own.

When these votaries of fashion quitted London for the summer season, they frequently repaired to some of those

those watering-places where the resort of company was likely to be most numerous and splendid : and whenever they allotted a portion of their time to be spent at their seat in Berkshire, they took care to engage such a succession of visitors as to banish every appearance of what might resemble domestic life. Had Lady Leslie received a more judicious education, and been allied to a man less attached to the gay world, her character would in all probability have entitled her to the esteem of those who, from the dissipated life she was accustomed to lead, had scarcely an opportunity of discerning the natural good qualities which she really possessed. Lady Leslie was an affectionate wife and a sincere friend ; she tenderly loved her children ; yet it must be ac-

known that she suffered her favourite pursuits to interfere too much with those duties which a parent ought to consider as in the highest degree sacred and indispensable. Her manners were polished, and her temper lively, even, and acquiescing ; but so powerful were the effects of education and habit, that, from a false estimation of the real blessings and pleasures of life, her attention was too frequently directed towards those objects which her judgement would have led her to appreciate more properly, had it not been biassed by the circumstances already mentioned. As Sir William had some taste for field sports, and had really a wish to cultivate the acquaintance of the Harwoods, to whom he felt conscious of having appeared negligent, if not
ungrateful,

ungrateful, he at length became an advocate for making this northern excursion.

Mr. Harwood had been several years a widower, and at the time when this melancholy event took place his eldest daughter Sophia had scarcely attained her eleventh year, and Elizabeth, his youngest, had not completed her first. Mrs. Harwood, for some time previous to her death, had been assisted in the education of her children by a Mrs. Irwin, who in many respects was extremely well qualified for so important an undertaking: she read with great propriety, and had a competent knowledge of the French and Italian languages; she was also a complete mistress of needlework of every description, and had the power of imparting to her pupils whatever she undertook to

to instruct them in, with great facility, and in the happiest manner. To these qualifications she added some skill in music, and a taste for drawing, which in the absence of a professed teacher rendered her an useful assistant.

Unfortunately for this young family, Mrs. Irwin was deficient in that one grand point, which at a proper age ought to take the lead of every other attainment, and be imprest on the young mind with the most unremitting care. It is true Mrs. Irwin went regularly to church with those of her pupils who were old enough to attend her; but as her own devotions were performed in a manner too mechanical powerfully to affect the heart, it is not to be supposed that she inspired the minds of the young people under her care with those warm and animated sentiments

timents which religion is so well calculated to excite: to the glow of ardour and enthusiasm which a truly pious mind delights to feel, Mrs. Irwin was totally a stranger. Had she in this respect been of a different disposition, a mind more formed to receive impressions favourable to religion could not have presented itself to her observation than that of Sophia Harwood. Happy would it have been, had the beneficial influences of habitual piety counteracted, at an early period, those propensities which are too apt to obtain an undue ascendancy where this most essential quality is wanting.

At the time when Miss Harwood was preparing for the reception of the guests already mentioned, she had been almost three years the acknowledged mistress of her father's house. The
occasion

occasion which she expected would call forth an extraordinary degree of exertion, she looked forward to with a mixture of apprehension and pleasure. Her society had hitherto been principally confined to the families who either resided in the vicinity of Harwood Park or within twenty miles of its neighbourhood. Amongst these families were many persons who to a knowledge of the world, and a considerable degree of talent, joined various mental acquirements, as well as a refined taste and elegant manners. With most of these families Sophia had been acquainted several years; with some from her earliest childhood; so that the friendly intercourse which had subsisted among them had been kept up, without feeling herself under that restraint which she imagined would be
unavoidable

unavoidable when the London guests of whom she was in expectation should arrive. As Mr. Harwood saw that his daughter's mind was imprest with this idea, he said every thing which he thought was calculated to dispel all traces of anxiety; telling her that the perfect ease and extreme gaiety of Lady Leslie's manners and disposition would very soon make her forget that many years had elapsed since they rambled together through the shades of Harwood, and together explored its remote and almost impervious recesses. Sir William Leslie they had never seen; but, from what report had circulated, they were authorized to anticipate in this gentleman a most pleasant companion, divested of every thing that could excite the least shadow of constraint.

One evening just as Sophia had closed the nursery door, after having imprinted a kiss of affection on the cheek of her sleeping sister Elizabeth, the sound of a carriage led her to suppose that at length her expected friends were really arrived. On entering the hall, this conjecture was confirmed by her father leading in Lady Leslie, to whom, and to Sir William, she was immediately introduced. As the two following letters may perhaps delineate the character and disposition of the lady above mentioned more fully than any further comments may effect, we shall here insert them; one is addressed to her brother, the other to her friend.

To the Hon. Mr. Villars.

October 12th.

My Dear Charles,

As you know I cannot dissemble, I am under the necessity of informing you that the intended lecture of which I gave you some intimation at parting with you in Berkshire, no longer retains a place in my thoughts. Absence, and my accustomed lenity, have disarmed me of all that resentment of which I fancied myself possessed ; so here I am, with all possible complacency, your most accommodating sister. But I believe you must not ascribe to my conciliating spirit alone the amicable adjustment of the affair in question ; every thing in these regions of serenity is so still, so harmonious, so foreign from whatever has the least affinity to discord,
that

that to enter them with an indignant or resentful frame of mind would seem almost like profanation.

We arrived in perfect safety, though later than was intended, on Wednesday evening, and, as you will conclude, were most cordially received by our kind friends. Mr. Harwood is less altered than I could have imagined; but in Sophia's face I cannot trace the least resemblance of the little companion who was always ready to attend me in my rambles through these scenes, which I recollect contemplating with enthusiastic rapture.

I scarcely know from which circumstance I derive the most pleasure; I mean that of seeing the father so stationary, or the progress made by the daughter in those qualities and attainments it is so desirable for a young woman

woman to excel in. The health and cheerfulness which Mr. Harwood enjoys is a striking instance of the good effects which result from a temperate life, constant exercise, and a tranquil temper. As to Sophia, she is the happiest creature I ever saw, not that her spirits appear to be exuberant or greatly elevated, but so even, so uninterruptedly good : her manners are so conciliating, and her gaiety so perfectly inoffensive, that it is impossible not to love and admire her. I should not speak of her real character so decidedly, had I not been assured by Mrs. Irwin, that were I to remain here many years, I should never see her appear otherwise than she does at present ; at least if the future is to be judged of by the past. Knowing this, I can't help comparing her to a sweet and melodious instrument.

strument that is never out of tune. In person she resembles Lionel, but her manners are more similar to William's. Her features are much softer than those of the former, and her complexion more delicate : with regard to the latter comparison, though the likeness is striking, her infinite sweetness and feminine gracefulness give an appropriate charm.

Amelia is of a more serious and retiring disposition than her sister ; but possesses a very good understanding, and a most affectionate heart.

It was not my intention on taking up my pen to give you even these slight sketches, as I hope you will soon have an opportunity of judging for yourself, and forming your own opinion in a more satisfactory manner than any report of mine will enable you to do.

Our

Our friends here are very anxious for your arrival ; Mr. Harwood speaks with great pleasure of many of your juvenile exploits which he has treasured up in his memory, but of which you have probably but little recollection.

Nor is Mr. Harwood the only person here who appears to take an interest in the occurrences of that period when you were a happy visitor at Harwood Park. I yesterday heard some ladies bestow many encomiums on your boyish perfections, which they doubted not were a true indication of more mature excellence. Whilst I listened to this prophetic eulogy, I happened to cast my eyes on the daughters of the lady who uttered it, and saw, or fancied I saw, more than a mere tacit acquiescence with what had been advanced. Whether

ther to impute to an early prepossession in your favour the pleasure which I thought the countenances of these young ladies expressed, or that the partiality of their mother had produced the effect, I cannot pretend to determine : but however this may be, I hope you will take care not to disappoint the expectations either of these good matrons, or their young disciples.

You will pardon me, dear Charles, if I give you a hint, that, as every one here is on the alert to oblige, you must guard against your old and almost inveterate enemies, absence and inattention. Should you give way to the languor which is too apt to characterize your manners, I do not know what constructions may be formed as to the cause in which such languor originates ;
but

but this I can safely assert, that the effect on our attentive friends here will not be pleasing.

I candidly confess that I cannot survey the long list of engagements which has presented itself to my view, without shrinking from the idea of fulfilling them, with a sort of dread which I find it impossible wholly to conquer. Our good neighbours are so extremely desirous to oblige, so unwearied in their exertions, that to make suitable returns to all these marks and tokens of excessive civility, is sometimes more than my spirits are quite equal to.

This information I know will not fail to cause an alarm ; but to compensate for the evil, I must again introduce to your notice our young hostess, whose companionable talents are such that she never fails to amuse ; whilst her easy un-

assuming

assuming manners are so free from every appearance of restraint, that, whilst you are delighted with her conversation, the effort to please entirely escapes your notice. Miss Harwood is the only young lady I have ever seen who did not appear to want the finish of a winter in London, to atone for the deficiencies of a retired education. My prejudices on this subject I must confess have been very strong, and, except in this solitary instance, were never overcome. Her elegance of manner I believe to be hereditary ; her mother possessing this enviable distinction in an eminent degree. But though Sophia does not *require* this London finish, I am not the less desirous of taking her there. She has so much animation, and enters into every little plan that may amuse with such ardour, and enjoys

joys it so entirely, that it would be quite a pity she should remain secluded here, and be deprived of the gratifications which London has to offer, until her charming spirits are checked by the adverse events of life. But this is a subject I do not mean to bring forward at present ; I have my fears that Mr. Harwood will not be inclined to accede to the proposal, and I intend to try and take him by surprise. I have really promised myself so much pleasure from the accomplishment of this plan, that I cannot reconcile the idea of a disappointment, and I will endeavour to hope that every impediment which may arise will eventually be removed.

What a change for Sophia ! She has never been more than thirty miles from this remote spot, where her whole life has been spent in such monotonous
tran-

tranquillity, that scarcely has one day varied from another. With what interest shall I trace the effects which wonder and delight will produce on her elegant and ingenuous mind, as the new world, on which I hope she will shortly enter, opens to her view ! But with a sparing hand I shall unlock the treasures that are in store for her, and gradually unfold them to her captivated senses. I every day figure to myself the pleasure with which this subject is fraught, and which time and circumstances, I trust, will realize.

This is a most happy resource for a vacant hour, and I hope will assist in shielding me from the dominion of that dreaded enemy, *ennui*. Whenever he threatens me with his approach, I shall have recourse to my talisman, and substitute ideal pleasures in the room of
positiv

positive ones. But you must not suppose, from what I have just said, that we are destitute of amusements, that may justly be so termed ; this is by no means the case, I assure you. There are rumours of two balls, at least, being in agitation ; but some demur has arisen with regard to the time for which they are to be fixt, lest you should not be punctual in adhering to yours.

I had no conception, when I took up my pen, that I should have extended this letter to such a length : as the fault is not an habitual one, I must hope you will the more readily pardon the prolixity of,

Dear Charles,

Your truly affectionate sister,

C. LESLIE.

To

To Miss Reynolds.

Harwood, Oct. 15th.

My dear Maria,

As you would in all probability be informed of our safe arrival here, soon after this long journey was accomplished, I have omitted writing for some days, that I might give you my opinion of what meets my observation here, somewhat more fully than it would have been in my power to do at an earlier period.

The first subject that occurs, is what occurs every day ; it is the thought of the happiness I should derive from your being here. Of all other places, this is the place which is exactly suited to your taste. The beauty of the situation nothing can exceed : of the kind
attention

attention paid by our friends it would be impossible to say too much. Sophia Harwood is the most charming companion you ever met with ; this, I doubt not, you will one day acknowledge. Amelia, who is several years younger, is of a more serious turn ; and, as she grows up, promises, in my opinion, very much to resemble a young friend of mine who ranks high in my esteem, and to whom I am extremely attached. Her understanding appears greatly to exceed what her age would authorize us to expect, for she has but just completed her fourteenth year.

Nothing but the conviction that your health is improving by your continued stay in Devonshire, could reconcile the circumstance of your not being of our party at Harwood Park. Our friends here frequently lament that the pure
air

air of this northern climate is not more congenial to your constitution ; but I hope, when we next visit Cumberland, you will be sufficiently robust to encounter the thin breezes which blow from these mountains, without sustaining any injury.

In a letter which I received from Charles, two or three days ago, he mentions that he hopes to be with us, on Monday evening ; he also acquaints me that his lively friend Lord Robert Vere had promised to accompany him : but unfortunately for all parties his father was taken ill on the day that Charles wrote, and Lord Robert was obliged to go immediately into Sussex. What an acquisition would this young nobleman have been to our society here !

After assuring you, dear Maria, that
I am

I am delighted with the Harwoods, that I admire exceedingly this romantic country, truth obliges me to acknowledge, that all would be insufficient to induce me to exceed the promised month allotted for our visit, unless some very particular circumstance should occur that may cause me to alter my intentions.

I candidly confess, that the most agreeable family which was ever distinguished by all that could fascinate and enliven, would, in my opinion, require those occasional changes which are derived from society at large. It is true, we are by no means deprived of those advantages which variety confers; but an increase of pleasure is not always the consequence of our domestic circle being extended. Yet there appear to be many worthy characters

here, and also people who are far from being destitute either of talent or information : but there is a general want of that refinement, elegance, and suavity of manner, which ranks so high in my estimation, and without which, very good and very clever people are extremely liable to render themselves disagreeable. On the contrary, those who are endowed with a moderate share of understanding, by taking care never to infringe the laws which politeness establishes, may render their conversation in some measure pleasing, if they exercise their judgement in not contributing more than a due proportion to the general stock ; but this cannot be done to any extent, particular circumstances excepted, without violating very materially the rules which politeness prescribes.

The

The former part of this remark was yesterday strikingly verified by the conduct of a Mr. Spencer, who, I am convinced, is a man of uncommon abilities, and quite a literary character. Unfortunately, this gentleman conceives that his profound erudition and brilliancy of parts authorize him to impose his opinions in the most dictatorial manner on those with whom he converses. Thus, he often excites disgust; when, by a candid and liberal mode of discussing the argument in question, he might frequently diffuse knowledge, and elucidate the truth. Genius is not always exempt from vanity and conceit; and when these qualities obtain an undue ascendancy, the possessor sometimes unwarily lays himself open to the just reprehension of the ignorant and the unlearned. In this si-

tuation did Mr. Spencer place himself, when I seized the opportunity of mortifying the self-complacency of this paragon of wit and learning. Sir William appeared a little alarmed at my temerity, but a general and approving smile soon dissipated his momentary apprehension.

Very different from this gentleman appear to be the disposition and character of Mr. Thornton, whose experiments in agriculture have been of great utility to those who have made this subject their study; but, unhappily for the friends with whom Mr. Thornton associates, he does not seem to have an idea that this topic can ever be discussed too frequently or too minutely: he appears to think, that, without any exception of age, sex, taste, or opinion, all must be delighted to hear of the
improvements

improvements made in this art ; and, I am persuaded, has no doubt but his elaborate and scientific disquisitions are as interesting, if not more so, to his auditors as to himself.

The dinner bell has occasioned a very seasonable interruption ; for, in my ardour for descanting on the trespasses committed by others, I was in great danger of forgetting that it was possible I might justly incur blame for the fault I so freely condemn. As this letter cannot go to the office until to-morrow, I shall reserve till then its concluding sentence.

Though I am no amateur of rural beauties, nor have I the power to describe fine scenery, yet I must not appear so totally insensible of what others view with such rapturous delight, as
not

not to mention in terms expressive of *some* admiration this romantic and diversified country. I yesterday strolled out alone, leaving Miss Harwood and Sir William deeply engaged at chess, whilst Mr. Harwood was anxiously watching the progress of a game the termination of which was enveloped in uncertainty. After rambling for nearly half an hour in a wood which sometimes concealed from my view the surrounding country, and at others partially displayed through accidental chasms a variety of interesting objects, I suddenly quitted the shelter of this recess, and found myself on the summit of an acclivity of which I had some recollection, though an imperfect one. I stood for a few minutes in profound meditation, intently gazing on the scene before me, yet my thoughts
recurring

recurring to events which an association of ideas had indistinctly revived in my mind. When I looked back on the simplicity of my former mode of life, and the taste I then indulged for the tranquil pleasures which were now regarded as insipid and flat, I sighed as I contrasted them; thinking that after all the latter were, perhaps, more calculated to promote solid and permanent happiness.

Whilst I stood on the solitary eminence, giving way to these reflections, the solemnity of the scene inspired me with a sort of awe which I cannot describe.

The woods and mountains concealed from my view almost every trace of human habitation, and scarcely a sound interrupted the deep and universal silence; I seemed as if alone in the creation ;

tion ; and whilst so lovely a part of it was presented to my view, I could not forbear wishing that I had cultivated a taste for picturesque scenery, and had the power of giving a lively representation of its beauties with the pencil and the pen. But in attempting this, I should only resemble a person who, in describing fine paintings, was obliged to confine himself to a mere literal account of the subject of the piece and the figures which compose it. This detail could convey to the imagination no idea of the rich colouring, whose softened shades are so nicely blended, that the eye is unable to trace the termination of the one or the commencement of the other. Equally at a loss should I be to give you even the most imperfect sketch of the wonderful effect produced by the shadows
of

of the vast mountains which give such sublimity and grandeur to this interesting picture. And were I to tell you, that on one side the landscape is bounded by a thick wood that shelters a rich and cultivated valley, beyond which rises an immense rock whose rugged surface heightens in appearance the fertility of some verdant hills in its vicinity, my recital would fail to produce any striking or lively images. The similitude already alluded to still exists ; for, were the figures of the piece described without attending to the justness of their proportions, expression of countenance, elegance of attitude, and the harmony which gives grace and beauty to the whole, you would in vain endeavour to trace the hand of a skilful artist in so imperfect a sketch.

Convinced how unequal would be any

attempt of mine to delineate the scenes which I hope will ere long be familiar to you, I must beg leave to descend from my exalted situation, and walk quietly home, conscious that I have no talent for description, and satisfied that happiness is not always the concomitant of genius.

Amongst other visitors who were here yesterday was Mr. Spencer, who the Harwoods declared was more agreeable than they had ever before seen him : they tell me I have certainly wrought a reformation : should this be really the case, I hope it will be a lasting one.

I could not forbear telling Sophia, after the departure of our guests, that I was surprised her young companions did not endeavour to copy her easy unassuming deportment and inoffensive gaiety, rather than seek for opportunities to display their various accomplishments,

ments, on which it was evident they piqued themselves in no inconsiderable degree. But I am still more surprised that the parents of these young people should encourage a mode of behaviour which, generally speaking, has a tendency to defeat the purpose for which it is adopted.

I wish the sight of this long letter may not annoy as much as it will surprise you; it may, perhaps, somewhat diminish the latter sentiment, when I tell you that it was begun four days ago, and is the production of four distinct periods. To protect you from future alarm, I think I ought to premise, that I will not again so greatly exceed those limits beyond which I am not accustomed to extend my epistolary favours.

I am daily expecting your promised
letter,

letter, which I hope and trust will be fraught with the happiest tidings. Sir William unites with me in the most affectionate remembrances. We also wish you to present our kind regards to your party at Dawlish.

Believe me, my ever dear Maria, your
most truly affectionate friend,

C. LESLIE.

On the evening of this day the family at Harwood had the pleasure of welcoming Mr. Villars upon his arrival at that place. Although this gentleman possessed none of that vivacity which usually enlivened the conversation of his sister, he had the same open, generous, and affectionate temper by which she was distinguished: these qualities were united to a very good understanding; but, unhappily for their
possessor,

possessor, an habitual indolence of disposition was too apt to counteract the good effects which exertion and diligence would have produced.

Mr. Villars had not been long at Harwood, however, before the languor and inattention so frequently observable in his manners underwent a material change, and gave way to a more animated and lively deportment. Lady Leslie observed the alteration with great pleasure, nor was she mistaken with regard to the cause in which she supposed it to originate.

Mr. Villars could scarcely be said to have any recollection of Miss Harwood, except that when playfellows together she was his favourite companion. The esteem which soon succeeded to the admiration he expressed for this young lady on the renewal of their acquaintance,

ance, might possibly be heightened by the childish prepossession which his memory retained. But however this may be, when the time drew near which Sir William and Lady Leslie had fixed upon for their leaving Cumberland, he was convinced that his attachment to Sophia was neither of a slight nor transient nature.

As yet, Lady Leslie had said nothing of the plan she had formed with regard to Miss Harwood accompanying her to London, nor on the subject of their leaving Cumberland. Both these circumstances she took an opportunity of mentioning to Sophia one evening just before they separated for the night.

This young lady had hitherto been accustomed to enjoy that uninterrupted repose which is usually the attendant of health, exercise, and a mind at ease :
but

but the new set of ideas which now presented themselves to her imagination so effectually banished all tendency to sleep, that she heard the clock strike four without having once closed her eyes.

Whenever Sophia had directed her thoughts towards London, she had regarded it as a place which contained what was infinitely beautiful and magnificent : but she had been in the habit of considering it in the same light which she would have done a splendid object, that was placed at such an immense distance as to preclude her from discerning its lustre, or being benefited by its influence.

The case was now altered : in idea, the distance that had hitherto appeared so formidable seemed almost annihilated, and a thousand gay visions floated
on

on her fancy. All that she had heard of the fascinating charms of music, the powers of eloquence, and the talents of a Siddons and a Kemble, rushed upon her mind : and whilst she considered the metropolis as a compendium of all that could inform the understanding and captivate the senses, she exultingly whispered to herself, that she was perhaps on the point of enjoying these exquisite, these untried pleasures, and her heart swelled with delight.

But as the overwhelming torrent suddenly deluges the neighbouring plains, and with its impetuous stream destroys the beauty with which every object was adorned ; so were the flattering images painted by the pencil of hope in such glowing colours chased in a moment from the mind of Sophia. The recollection of her father entirely effaced

effaced the airy structure which in so alluring a form had presented itself to view. What were the sacrifices that must be made by this dear parent, before she could enjoy what had just before appeared almost within her reach ! Who was to amuse him during the long evenings of winter ? Amelia had but little taste for music, no knowledge of chess, and was too young to be his chief companion. She fancied she saw her father sitting pensive and silent, his thoughts recurring to the past, and regretting that the hours were no longer enlivened by former enjoyments. She could not contemplate this picture without being sensibly touched by its melancholy traits, and the tear of tenderness stole silently down her cheek.

In resolving how to act, she had not the smallest hesitation ; and on the following

lowing morning, after expressing her gratitude for the favour Lady Leslie intended her, excused herself for declining to accept it until Amelia was a year or two older; when, if her father would allow her the liberty of doing so, she should most gladly comply with a proposal so highly gratifying.

Lady Leslie was unwilling to give up her favourite point, but found Miss Harwood so steady in adhering to her resolution, and her motives for forming it so laudable, that not to acquiesce without further entreaty would have appeared selfish and obtrusive.

The circumstance of Lady Leslie's approaching departure was evidently so painful a one to Mr. and Miss Harwood, that, on finding Sir William had no objection to prolong his stay another fortnight, it was fixed that they should
remain

remain in Cumberland until the twentieth of November.

When Lady Leslie informed Sir William that she was disappointed in the hope she had entertained of taking Miss Harwood to London, he replied, that as far as related to his own and Lady Leslie's gratification, he regretted that this favour was denied them ; but added, that he had felt some uneasiness on the subject, lest the future happiness of Sophia might be endangered by an introduction to scenes so very dissimilar to those she was accustomed to, and might be accustomed to hereafter : this he confessed reconciled him in some degree to a disappointment which would otherwise have been the cause of much regret. Lady Leslie made no direct answer to these remarks ; but told Sir William, whatever effect
the

the town might have had on Miss Harwood, the country seemed to have transformed him into a moralist; a change which she acknowledged there was but little reason to expect: if, therefore, situation and circumstances had such an influence on the taste and sentiments, it was perhaps better that their young friend was not exposed to the danger of losing that relish for simple pleasures which seemed at present to constitute her happiness.

But the grand source from which Lady Leslie derived consolation on the failure of her plan, was the hope she entertained of seeing Miss Harwood one day become her sister: this opinion, though it was conceived at an early period after Mr. Villars's arrival, had not been uniformly retained; sometimes she encouraged the idea, and at
others

others rejected it. A circumstance however occurred, on the day previous to that which was fixed for their leaving Harwood, that convinced her it was her brother's intention to solicit the hand of Sophia.

Whilst the family were at breakfast, Lady Leslie told Mr. Villars, that if the weather was unfavourable she hoped he would resign the curricule to the care of his servant, and take a seat in the carriage with Sir William and herself. Mr. Villars was silent for a few moments, then made the following reply : “ So you think, Lady Leslie, were I to request our friends would extend their hospitality to me a few days beyond the time of your and Sir William's departure, I should scarcely succeed in being honoured with such a mark of their favour ? ” This speech excited
a general

a general surprise ; but the manner in which it was uttered, implied some doubt whether it was intended to be taken as jest or earnest. Mr. Harwood replied to it, however, in a manner which showed that he regarded it in the latter point of view.

Lady Leslie happening soon after to see Mr. Villars alone, said with an air of gaiety, "I protest, Charles, I believe you are half in love with Sophia." "But will you," he rejoined, "protest that I am *only* half in love ? I give you fair warning, that you may possibly bring yourself into a predicament should you be too secure on that head." This prelude led to a more serious discussion of the subject ; and Mr. Villars requested, that when Lady Leslie wrote to her friend, she would warmly plead his cause, for she might be assured of
his

his having before that time explained his sentiments in the most unequivocal terms. This, Lady Leslie with the utmost cheerfulness promised to do, and the partiality with which she regarded her brother led her to hope that he would not prove an unsuccessful candidate.

Soon after Sir William and Lady Leslie had taken leave of their friends, some gentlemen called on Mr. Harwood to request he would accompany them on a shooting expedition; and, on finding Mr. Villars intended to prolong his stay in the country, expressed great pleasure from the hope that he would join their party. As Mr. Harwood made no objection to their proposal, if it met with Mr. Villars's approbation, the latter thought he could not with propriety avoid complying with it, though

though from choice he would have declined doing so.

Until this day, Miss Harwood had scarcely ever felt that oppression which arises from languor and a distaste for all employment. In losing Lady Leslie, she had lost a friend and a companion, who had so entirely gained upon her affections that regret for her departure dwelt so powerfully on her mind, that it seemed to tincture every object which presented itself to her view, and gave her a distaste for whatever she tried to devote her attention to. Thus spiritless and dejected, she waited the approach of evening, when she expected the gentlemen would return. But in this she was disappointed; for the servant who had attended them delivered her a note from Mr. Harwood, who informed her, that having proceeded further

ther than they had originally intended, the time of their return was uncertain. This intelligence did not contribute towards the revival of Miss Harwood's spirits ; nor were they on the following morning exhilarated, by being obliged to receive a succession of visitors who came professedly to console her on the loss she had sustained. Few people were more exempt from the feelings which arise from a fastidious or captious disposition than this young lady, yet she could not on the present occasion acquit herself of being tinctured with a fault to which she had hoped she was almost a stranger. On the departure of her guests, who had extended their charitable visits to an unusual length, Sophia, conscious of having felt some impatience, was fearful that she had betrayed it also, and reproach-

ed herself for appearing ungrateful to those who had intended showing her a kindness.

This seemed the longest day she had ever experienced ; nor could she on its close review it but with dissatisfaction and regret. In the evening Mr. Harwood and Mr. Villars returned home, which served in some measure to dissipate her chagrin ; and in the course of a few days her thoughts were engrossed by a subject as interesting as it was unexpected. This, it will readily be conjectured, was the explanation before alluded to, which Mr. Villars intended to make of the sentiments with which Sophia had inspired him. She had hitherto regarded this gentleman in no other light than that of a friend ; but, as such, felt for him a degree of preference which prevented her from totally

tally rejecting an offer that she could not but consider in some respects as highly eligible.

On referring this affair to her father, he expressed the regard which he felt for Mr. Villars in the most unreserved manner; but at the same time assured Sophia that he wished her to act in this important matter agreeably to the dictates of her own judgement and inclinations, after maturely weighing every circumstance which related to it.

Whilst conversing on this subject, Miss Harwood thought she observed in the countenance of her father an expression of sorrow which he endeavoured to conceal; nor was she surprised at this, her own heart being sensibly touched when she reflected on the very painful circumstances that

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must

must attend a connexion which would place her at such a vast distance from all that had hitherto been dear to her. Every object on which her fondest affections had been placed in childhood and in youth, was centered in Harwood and its vicinity. Yet hope and expectation were ready to suggest, that there might be in store for her scenes replete with happiness, not only exquisite but durable, if she rejected not the opportunity of obtaining it.

Whilst her mind was in this fluctuating state, she received a letter from York, written by Lady Leslie on her arrival at that city, who did not forget the promise she had made her brother, in speaking of whom, she perhaps evinced more ardency of affection than accuracy of judgement. The following paragraph,

paragraph, with which she concludes this subject, may possibly be thought to justify the foregoing observation.

“In giving you these sketches, I think I have divested myself of all partiality ; and I am persuaded you will consider the few failings which I have faithfully enumerated, as light and superficial blemishes : they are like shadows, which, whilst they impair the lustre of a brilliant object, cannot essentially diminish its intrinsic value.”

Miss Harwood had never considered this affair in a light which gave her reason to think, that, if it was the wish of her father that she should relinquish all thoughts of Mr. Villars, she could not readily conform to that wish. She read Lady Leslie's letter, however, with a degree of interest which, before its arrival, she did not conceive it was possible

sible it could have produced. The praises Lady Leslie had bestowed on her brother had a wonderful effect on the mind of Sophia, nor could it be a slight gratification to find that the friend, whom of all others she loved and admired, was so strenuous an advocate for her becoming her sister. This idea was highly flattering; nor could she look forward to such a connexion without indulging the most delightful emotions.

To be the chosen companion as well as the sister of such a woman as Lady Leslie, was in itself a circumstance so replete with pleasure, that she could not dwell upon it without feeling the most lively gratitude, mingled with a variety of sensations not to be described, but which for some time engrossed her thinking faculties almost exclusively.

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One passage in Lady Leslie's letter dwelt very powerfully on the mind of Miss Harwood, and contained the following words: "Whenever you are disposed to join the gay world in the circles of fashion, you will find Charles ready to partake with you of the varied amusements they afford: but if the quiet of your own drawing-room appears preferable, he will be equally gratified, I am sure, by contributing in every possible way to your domestic pleasures."

In either point of view the picture charmed her imagination. The idea of partaking of those pleasures where so much talent is exerted to solicit the attention of the public, could not be indulged without ardour, hope and animation, in a young mind like Miss Harwood's; nor could she contemplate with apathy those domestic scenes
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that would be rendered interesting by the society of such a man as Mr. Villars. His mental powers, it was true, did not appear to be of a vigorous and energetic nature, but they were of that description which was perhaps more likely to render her happy. She had every reason to believe he possessed great sweetness of temper, an understanding by no means contemptible, and a taste for those elegant and refined pleasures which give to social life such an inexpressible charm.

These reflections transfused over her mind such a delightful though indistinct consciousness of approaching happiness, that she fell into a sort of delicious dream, from which she perhaps would not soon have awakened, had not a gentle step across her dressing-room roused her from the reverie into which she was plunged.

plunged. On looking up, she saw her sister Elizabeth, who came to inform her that she was wanted to make tea. Sophia no sooner beheld the little ambassadress, than the gay visions which had so charmed and occupied her mind vanished in a moment. Her father, her sisters, her brothers, her beloved home, all rushed at once upon her imagination :—the effect was too powerful to be resisted, and she burst into tears.

The surprise and sorrow expressed in the countenance of Elizabeth, on seeing this emotion of grief in the mind of her sister, brought Sophia to her recollection, and convinced her how necessary it was to regain her usual composure. She soothed and satisfied the affectionate little girl in the best manner she could, and dismissed her with an assurance that she would very

soon obey the summons. Although Miss Harwood endeavoured as much as possible to appear cheerful and easy, she could not conceal her embarrassment from the penetrating eyes of her father and Mr. Villars.

As soon as the tea equipage was removed, the former, in hopes of relieving her, proposed a game at chess, to which she willingly assented: but though a more experienced performer than Mr. Villars, she was obliged to acknowledge herself this evening unequal to the attempt of obtaining a victory over either of her opponents.

Before they parted for the night, Miss Harwood took an opportunity of showing her father the letter she had received from Lady Leslie. This letter was the cause of a variety of emotions in Mr. Harwood's mind. The affection
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he expressed for his daughter was in the highest degree grateful to his heart: her frank and open manner charmed him; and he thought it would be not only ungenerous, but unjust, to feel any dissatisfaction with regard to the character and disposition of Mr. Villars. But the most flattering prospects could not secure this anxious and kind parent from the anguish attendant on such a separation; the distant thought of which, clouded the bright scene in a moment. However, he struggled to overcome every selfish consideration; and, after recommending Sophia to weigh all the circumstances relative to so important a subject with the utmost care and circumspection, left the decision entirely to herself.

In the course of the following morning Mr. Villars was admitted to a private

vate conference with Miss Harwood. Her manner towards him during the preceding evening gave more hope of a favourable result from this wished-for yet dreaded interview, than he had before ventured to entertain. When Mr. Harwood enjoined Sophia to consult her own heart, and be guided entirely by its dictates, she perhaps felt more pleasure on the occasion than she was willing to acknowledge even to herself. But in whatever light she chose to consider this matter, it certainly operated in Mr. Villars's favour; for the meditations of the evening and the morning were a happy prelude to the intercessions of her lover; and before the expiration of the week she had no doubt respecting the reality of her attachment.

After spending upwards of two months in Cumberland, Mr. Villars
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took a reluctant leave of a place now so greatly endeared to him ; but not without a promise of being allowed to repeat his visit very early in the spring. During the intermediate time he proposed devoting his attention to the repairing and beautifying his seat in Kent, which had for many years been totally neglected. This respectable family mansion was charmingly situated near the coast, and commanded a very fine view of the sea. Although the season was unfavourable for building, as well as planning pleasure-grounds, &c., Mr. Villars was not to be intimidated by these objections, but began his operations as soon as possible, taking with him an architect from London.

Having got every thing into a train, after giving strict orders for the utmost expedition to be used in the execution of
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of his plans, he made his appearance at Harwood Park before the gay harbingers had yet announced the return of spring, pleading that his presence in Kent would be more necessary when that season was further advanced. So swiftly flew the days and weeks in the society of his beloved Sophia, that it was the middle of April before Mr. Villars bad a reluctant adieu to Harwood; and, previous to his departure from that place, obtained permission to claim the promised hand of its fair mistress early in June.

Lady Leslie had passed the winter in the same manner she had done several preceding ones; immersed in a constant round of frivolous amusements. As Miss Reynolds had experienced a slight return of her complaints about the time that Lady Leslie arrived in Berkshire,

Berkshire, it was thought advisable that she should continue at Dawlish during the whole of the winter season. This arrangement was a cruel disappointment to Miss Leslie and her sister, between whom and Miss Reynolds there subsisted an attachment which is seldom formed where the disparity of age is so considerable. Miss Reynolds loved these interesting children with all the affection of a sister ; whilst they regarded her with a tenderness little short of that which they felt for the kindest of parents. The circumstances which contributed to form and strengthen this attachment will appear in a letter of Miss Reynolds's, written soon after her return into Berkshire.

This journey took place early in May, when she had the happiness of being re-united to her friends at Woodland, who

who welcomed her home with every possible expression of the most lively joy. Of Miss Reynolds's late indisposition there were now no traces, which completed the pleasure felt by Sir William and Lady Leslie on this happy meeting. A few weeks before this young lady quitted Dawlish, she became acquainted with a Doctor and Mrs. Howard of Exeter, who were particularly pleased with her obliging manner and prepossessing appearance : this impression was soon heightened into esteem and friendship, by the good sense and amiable disposition which her conversation evinced. Mrs. Howard was a woman of exemplary piety, and had an excellent understanding joined to a most friendly heart. The Doctor was also highly respectable for the integrity and uprightness of his conduct as well as
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for the unremitting attention he showed in the discharge of his clerical duties. But notwithstanding Doctor Howard possessed these valuable qualities in an eminent degree, there were shades in his character which those who knew him most intimately, and were best acquainted with his merit, were most apt to lament.

Doctor Howard was not sufficiently actuated by that charity which "suffereth long and is kind." He attached so much importance to certain religious principles, and maintained them with so much tenacity whenever the subject was introduced, that he could not forbear showing some degree of asperity to those who were of a different persuasion. This rigid adherence to opinions which he thought it the duty of every one to imbibe, who either attend-
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ed his public labours or had an opportunity of hearing him discuss his favourite topic in conversation, gave to his general manners an appearance of reserve and constraint, of which he seldom wholly divested himself, except when in company with those whose sentiments he knew to be similar to his own. The more frequently this gentleman was in company with Miss Reynolds, the more highly he thought of her merit and good sense; yet he feared there were great deficiencies in her judgement, which, should it be in his power, he thought it his duty to rectify.

Conceiving this to be the case, he made several overtures towards a free discussion of those points on which he laid such particular stress. Miss Reynolds replied to what he said with great modesty and good humour, paying all
due

due respect and deference to the arguments he made use of, yet evidently avoided yielding her assent to what he maintained as incontrovertible: she showed no disposition either to conform to his opinions, or enter minutely into the merits of the case.

But this seeming indifference did not lessen the Doctor's ardour for carrying on his design of making a proselyte. Speaking of the subject to Mrs. Howard, it was agreed that they should solicit the favour of Miss Reynolds's company to take a ride with them to Exeter, where they were to spend two or three days early in the ensuing week in order to transact some business of importance. Mrs. Howard was greatly pleased with the opportunity she hoped she should have of introducing Miss Reynolds to her daughters, two of whom

whom were nearly of the same age. These young ladies remained at home, to be company for each other, and take care of a younger sister and brother.

But the accomplishment of the proposed plan was defeated by Miss Reynolds receiving a letter from Sir William Leslie, which informed her that his intention of taking a journey to Dawlish, in order to conduct her home, was superseded, by their mutual friend Mr. Melford having made an offer to take her and the lady who was with her under his protection. As this gentleman had business at Bristol, Miss Reynolds was very glad that her guardian had accepted an offer which would save him the trouble of taking so long a journey on her account; and as she had been attended by a trusty domestic, who had lived many years in the family
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of Sir William during the time she was in Devonshire, she had repeatedly written to say that she should undertake the journey without the least apprehension. These remonstrances, however, had been of no avail; for as the gentleman and lady who had accompanied her to Dawlish had quitted that place, Sir William was determined to adhere to his resolution of not confiding her wholly to the care of a female companion and servants.

On the day after Miss Reynolds received the letter already mentioned, Mr. Melford arrived; and on the following morning the party took their departure for Berkshire. The answers which Doctor Howard received relative to the inquiries he had made with regard to the situation and connexions of Miss Reynolds, had greatly awakened his

his compassion for her : he considered her to be in a lost state ; and was determined to make one effort at least towards emancipating her from engagements which he conceived must be fatal to her most important interests. Actuated by these sentiments, he addressed to this young lady the following letter.

To Miss Reynolds.

Dawlish.

Dear Madam,

I flatter myself that the degree of friendly intercourse which subsisted between us when I had the happiness of enjoying your conversation in Devonshire, together with the motive that induces me to address you by letter, will plead my excuse for taking such a liberty. The piety and good sense which I have observed in your conduct, is
such

such as few young persons, I fear, possess.

When I found you were an orphan, I pitied you exceedingly ; though, God knows, there are too many parents who, instead of setting their children an example of holiness, and training them up in the paths of virtue, countenance them in acts of the most flagrant impiety. But, as I said before, I pitied you sincerely for being an orphan ; for, bad as the world is, there are yet many good and pious parents, and yours might be of that happy description ; though I am greatly staggered to think how it can have happened that you should be committed to the care of such dissipated characters as I find Sir William and Lady Leslie most undoubtedly are. But as I am informed
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it is now in your own power to choose a guardian, let me beseech you, dear madam, to avail yourself of this privilege which the law affords, and do not hazard your everlasting salvation by continuing in a scene where a constant round of pleasure and amusement must totally unfit the mind for the more noble exercises of religion.

Pardon me for speaking thus plainly; not that I mean to say *you* are included in this censure; but though you do not absolutely partake of these pleasures in their full extent, yet, to countenance such folly and immorality by living in a family where these enormities are practised, is in some measure sharing the guilt which is incurred. Amongst those persons with whom you are in the habit of associating, there cannot,
I think,

I think, be a doubt but you must constantly witness the prophanation of the sabbath ; and though I am of opinion that you regularly attend public worship at least once on this day set apart for that solemnity, it is a sad supplement, if I may be allowed the term, to mix with a set of beings wholly devoted to the pleasures of the world, and who are almost strangers to every thing which belongs to Christianity, except its name.

It is a difficult thing, frail and imperfect as are the best of us, even in situations most favourable to religion and virtue, to keep clear of sin in a great variety of forms ; it is continually assailing us both within and without. How then can it be supposed that a young person like you should be safe, whilst surrounded by the votaries of

vice and folly. I fear I am not departing far from the truth, when I say that I apprehend a day can scarcely elapse, but your ears are offended by expressions which are a direct violation of the third Commandment. But were I to enumerate all the atrocities which abound in what is called the fashionable world, I should extend this letter to a length far beyond its proposed limits. Before I conclude, I must entreat your permission to lay before you, in a future letter, some particulars, which I hope will have a tendency to strengthen your principles and render your faith more sound.

Mrs. Howard unites with me in every kind wish and most affectionate remembrance. The favour of an answer, as soon as your leisure and inclination will allow, shall be most gratefully acknowledged

known by, dear madam, your
sincere friend

And obedient servant,

C. HOWARD.

Although there were many passages in this letter which were not only unpleasant but really painful to Miss Reynolds, yet she was not unmindful of the motive that influenced the writer, which she was convinced was a sincere desire to promote her real welfare, and lead her to adopt a mode of conduct that would most effectually conduce to render her good and happy. She wished to answer Doctor Howard's letter in such a manner as would express her sense of the obligation he had conferred upon her, yet, in the handsomest terms she could make use of consistently with truth, decline engaging in a cor-

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respondence from which she could neither hope to derive pleasure nor instruction. After repeatedly perusing this epistle, she at length determined on making the following reply.

To Dr. Howard.

Dear Sir,

Woodland.

It is with sentiments of unfeigned gratitude that I now take up my pen to thank you for the kind letter with which you have favoured me, and to explain to you my reasons for continuing in the family of Sir William Leslie. When I shall have acquainted you with the particulars of my situation, manner of life, and the inducements I have still to continue the ward of Sir William, I hope you will view the circumstance in a more favourable light, and consider those inducements as sufficiently

ently powerful for justifying my conduct in your opinion.

I feel quite impatient to rescue the memory of my revered parents from the implied imputation of choosing for their child a guardian whose character unfitted him for fulfilling so important a trust with care and propriety. I had the misfortune to lose my father when I had scarcely attained my seventh year : but it was the late Sir William Leslie, a man eminently distinguished for his religious and moral conduct, as well as for an excellent understanding and benevolent temper, who was appointed my guardian. During the life of my mother, he showed us both every possible attention ; and when I was deprived of my surviving parent, the house of Sir William and his lady became my home, where I was treated
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with all the tenderness of parental affection.

I was at this time about fifteen years of age, and Lady Leslie, whose health was in a very declining state, appeared much pleased with the attention which my gratitude and affection led me to pay her: and in thus contributing towards rendering the hours of this excellent woman less irksome, I derived a degree of consolation for the loss of my dear and lamented mother which no other circumstance afforded me. In about two years after the death of this valuable parent, Lady Leslie was deprived of one of the best of husbands, and I of a most kind and attentive guardian. Sir William, though a young man when he became heir to the title and estate, was a widower, and had two daughters, the eldest of whom
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was about three years of age when I was first received into the family.

As Sir William came to reside at Woodland Castle on the death of his father, he brought with him his two little girls, who in a short time became so dear to me, that had they been my sisters I thought I could not have loved them better.

At the time of the late Sir William Leslie's death, preparations were making for the marriage of his son, which event took place as soon as that respect was paid to the memory of his father which Sir William considered as indispensable. When the family removed to London, it would have been my wish to have remained with the Lady Dowager, had not my attachment to the Miss Leslies been such as would
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have rendered a separation in the highest degree painful.

You are now, sir, convinced that my parents cannot have incurred the smallest censure in a point where your regard for my interest led you to fear they had made an injudicious choice. I will now acquaint you with my manner of spending my time when in London, which I flatter myself you will not consider as quite so unprofitable as you may at present apprehend.

I soon found after our arrival in London, that I should be involved in a constant round of visiting and amusements, unless I formed a regular plan for the disposal of my time : this I accordingly did, and requested the permission of Sir William and his Lady to adopt my new system ; in this they
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would not oppose me, although they were far from approving rules which appeared to them quite inconsistent with my situation in life, and unsuited to my years. A French lady, highly recommended for the elegant and correct manner in which she spoke her native language, as well as for various other accomplishments, was engaged as governess to the young ladies. I should have felt extremely concerned at this choice, had I not hoped it would be in my power to counteract in some measure the inconveniencies of which I feared it would be productive. I earnestly requested that Sir William and Lady Leslie would allow me to instruct my young friends, in the best manner I was capable, in those branches of education for which I thought an English-

woman and a Protestant would be the most suitable.

I had the happiness to find my proposal most willingly acceded to ; and I can truly say that in this employment I have found a pleasure which few other circumstances have afforded me : and as I have engaged in this undertaking with so much delight, I hope my zeal in the cause will in some measure atone for want of ability. I love my pupils with an affection which words cannot sufficiently express, and I have every reason to believe that this affection meets with no scanty return.

As Madame Dussaux is glad of the opportunity to spend every Sunday among her own friends, our pupils are on that day entirely under my care ; Lady Leslie having the goodness to allow

low me this privilege. We breakfast together at an early hour, after which we read a small portion of Scripture, and the children repeat their catechism. We then attend morning service, from which we always return home immediately, and each endeavours to recollect what they can remember of the sermon we went to hear: it is not to be supposed that much can be retained by such young minds; but I think the rule has a tendency to enforce the habit of keeping up the attention; and it also gives me an opportunity of repeating any passages with which my own memory may have been imprest. If Lady Leslie is at home, we then spend some time with her; after which, unless something particular occurs to prevent us, we go to dine with a lady who is a distant relation of my own, and whose sentiments

ments and manner of life are such as has always made me desirous of cultivating her friendship. This lady has several daughters, and her two youngest are nearly the same age with the Miss Leslies : this renders the visit extremely interesting to both parties. Mrs. Weldon always dines early on a Sunday, and we seldom omit attending the afternoon service ; after which we devote ourselves entirely to the young people, and endeavour to convey some useful instruction without exciting weariness. Suitable conversation, books and sacred music usually occupy the remaining part of the day. After seeing my little girls in bed, I generally retire to my own room, where I frequently remain during the rest of the evening. Sir William and his Lady are often either out, or have company of a less select

select description than I wish to mix with ; when otherwise, I am happy to join them.

I must now trespass a little further on your patience, whilst I inform you how far I allow myself to partake of those amusements which I deem innocent in themselves, but become hurtful by engrossing too much time and attention.

When Lady Leslie has company at home, she gives me liberty to retire whenever it is my wish to do so ; and as I always decline cards, I can generally leave the rooms without being remarked. I do not avoid playing cards because I think it a crime to engage in the amusement when this is done under proper restrictions, but because I am not fond of them ; and if I really were so, I should still, circumstanced as I now am, think it wrong to indulge myself

myself in what would lead me into inevitable inconveniences; for were I ever to join these parties, it would be impossible for me to preserve that independency with regard to the disposal of my time which I now enjoy. Politeness would oblige me to make many sacrifices that cannot now be required of me. I seldom accompany Lady Leslie when she pays those visits where cards are the avowed object. To the theatre, the opera, or any other musical meeting, when I am induced by having the opportunity of joining a pleasant party, I allow myself to go about twice in a week; a greater indulgence than this I should consider as impolitic, did no objections of a more serious nature exist; as by attending these amusements too frequently, I am persuaded I should lose that relish
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for them which I think it desirable to preserve.

In giving you the history of the day, I hope I need not say that my first duties are regularly performed before I enter into any other concerns. About ten o'clock I always receive a summons from Madame Dussaux, with whom and the young ladies, I spend half an hour whilst they breakfast, and take with them one cup of coffee or tea, as I always join Lady Leslie at breakfast, whose hours are very late. The intermediate time, or at least the greatest part of it, I devote to reading, in which employment the study of sacred history always takes the lead. After breakfast, if the weather is fine, we frequently drive to the Park, and Madame Dussaux and myself generally alight and walk with the children: the
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rest of the morning is filled up as circumstances direct. In the course of the day, Miss Leslie and her sister always spend two hours with me independent of all casual intercourse. The allotted time I have mentioned is appropriated to the regular routine of their various studies. The leisure hours which I can command are usually filled up by the different employments of reading, working, writing, music, and drawing; I mean independent of that time which is devoted to society at home and abroad.

This sentence reminds me of what you say respecting the violation of the third Commandment, which you justly observe must, among those with whom I associate, occasionally wound my feelings: yet I cannot consider myself as culpable for merely being present when
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this fault is committed ; and I am happy to say, that in several instances I have succeeded in rendering these painful exclamations much less frequent among some of my female acquaintance, to whom they were become so habitual as to make them almost unconscious of the expressions they were using. With regard to those particular opinions relative to religious subjects which you wish to recommend, I do not consider myself qualified to judge of them with that accuracy which you may think they require. I humbly hope that in declining to engage in the discussion of these speculative points, I am not receding from a duty enjoined in the sacred writings ; by that holy book I wish to regulate my conduct, and by obeying its divine laws, and practising the pure precepts it contains, secure to myself

myself those treasures which are reserved for them that love God. That I may thus work out my own salvation is my earnest and daily prayer to that Being, who, in pity to our infirmities, has blessed us with the light of the glorious Gospel : I hope and trust that this light will not be afforded me in vain, but that I shall be amongst that happy number whose sins and errors, through the intercession of a suffering Saviour, shall be blotted from the book of record, and that a sincere repentance will be accepted instead of sinless obedience. On this gracious promise do I rely : it is the promise of that God who is faithful to his word, and who in his infinite mercy does not require from his imperfect creatures more than a reasonable service. I have great reliance on the words of the apostle Paul,

Paul, who says, “Hast thou faith—have it to thyself before God.” From this advice of the inspired writer, I should think it is just to infer that he did not consider faith as a mere creed, or any peculiar point of doctrine, but as that inward principle which leads to right action; that perfect reliance on the existence of God and his divine attributes, and the glorious truths and animating promises contained in the everlasting Gospel. This steadfast and well-grounded faith removes in some measure that impenetrable veil which conceals from our imperfect sight the transcendent brightness of the heaven to which we aspire; a brightness which far surpasses all human comprehension, as it would be too exquisite for mortal sight to contemplate. Thus does faith give us a foretaste of those joys which
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are prepared for us in that unseen and eternal world, which to those who are destitute of this divine principle must be wrapt in obscurity.

I hope, Sir, what I have said will reconcile you to my continuing in the situation in which I am placed, and that you will think me justified in not quitting a family where I am willing to hope I have the power as well as the wish of being useful.

I am happy to say that I have a friend who frequently visits here, to whom I am accustomed to apply for advice and instruction. The opinion of this gentleman, whose profession is the same with your own, I have in many instances adopted; and his kind attention, with the deference which I pay to that opinion, has inspired me with more confidence than I could have possibly derived

derived from my own unassisted judgment. Mr. Sherwood, the gentleman alluded to, is a distant relation of Sir William Leslie's, by whom he is highly respected. The motive which leads him to visit here is principally that of endeavouring to be of use ; for the society he generally meets with is not adapted to his taste, and consequently but little calculated to contribute to his pleasure. To this gentleman I have on many occasions been highly indebted, particularly in what relates to my beloved pupils ; and when I have not an opportunity of requesting his assistance in a personal interview, he allows me the liberty of addressing him by letter. Had you the happiness of knowing this excellent man, you would, I am sure, feel for him all that respect and esteem to which his professional talents
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and Christian virtues so eminently entitle him.

I must now, sir, entreat your pardon for having in so unreasonable a manner trespassed on your patience, and once again thank you for all your kindness.

You will have the goodness to present to Mrs. Howard, and accept yourself, my best wishes and affectionate regards; and be assured, that to hear of your health and happiness will always afford the most sincere pleasure to, dear sir, your truly obliged friend

And obedient servant,

MARIA REYNOLDS.

In a few minutes after Miss Reynolds had finished this letter, she was summoned to the parlour on a very joyful occasion. The children so dear to her she had not yet seen; they were paying
a visit

a visit with their grandmamma at the house of a friend who lived at a considerable distance from Woodland Castle. It was the intention of the Dowager Lady Leslie to have returned home prior to the time of Miss Reynolds being expected, but was prevented by indisposition.

The servant who informed Miss Reynolds that her little friends were arrived, had scarcely pronounced the words which conveyed this intelligence, before they rushed into the room, and were instantly folded in the arms of their beloved Miss Reynolds. When the tumultuous joy which this happy meeting inspired was in some measure subsided, Cecilia, taking the hand of her friend, said, “ We are quite impatient, Miss Reynolds, to say some lessons to you ; we wish so much to know whether

ther you will think we have remembered them as well as you expected." Miss Reynolds assured them that she should be quite happy to resume her former occupation as soon as they pleased, and that she was convinced, from what they had just said, there was no doubt of their having endeavoured to retain in their memory a part of what she had taught them.

Cecilia immediately requested they might attend her when tea was over; which petition was most cheerfully complied with. After the wished-for examination had taken place, Miss Reynolds not only expressed her approbation of the very great attention they had paid to her instructions, but her surprise also at their having remembered them so perfectly. The eyes of Cecilia and Fanny sparkled with delight
on

on receiving these praises from one they so tenderly loved, and the latter said, "I'm sure, Miss Reynolds, I should not have remembered all these things half so well, if Cecilia had not helped me; but she often said she would try to do as you did, and so that was the reason." Whilst this little ingenuous girl was speaking, Miss Reynolds took from her cabinet two beautiful boxes ornamented by herself, and, presenting a key to each of her pupils, requested them to give her their opinion of the contents, which she hoped they would accept as a token of her love. She stood for some time a silent spectator of the joy and surprise with which these happy children explored their treasures, and the encomiums they had received from the donor constituted no small part of the

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delight which animated their young hearts. At length Miss Reynolds exclaimed, whilst she tenderly kissed them, "Oh! how charming it is to reward merit!"

Miss Reynolds's attention had been so much engrossed by the occurrences of the day, that she had not once thought on the contents of the letter she had dispatched to Doctor Howard: but no sooner did she retire to her own apartment, than the recollection of what she had said brought with it some painful sensations, lest in her reply to the Doctor's friendly interference she might have said something that would excite displeasure. She began to fear that in avoiding an explanation of those subjects which the Doctor seemed to regard as essential to her best interests, she might have been blameable.

No

No one could be more open to conviction than Miss Reynolds ; few possessed the same degree of humility, or were equally ready to lay aside those prejudices which had been the means of concealing truth from her mind. She therefore questioned herself, whether she had not appeared presumptuous in thus departing from her usual mode of conduct, which was that of seizing every opportunity to acquire useful knowledge.

These painful reflections were at length almost subdued, by considering that in the present instance she could appeal to higher authority than that of any human dictator. She had the word of God for her guide ; and to this source she had been directed by the friend, whom of all others she thought the most capable of assisting her,—the

good Mr. Sherwood. His gentleness and candour, the unwearied assiduity with which he pursued his studies, and his unblemished life, gave him, in the opinion of Miss Reynolds, a superiority over every other character which had as yet met her observation.

The month of June had scarcely commenced, before a very numerous party of friends were assembled at the hospitable mansion of Sir William Leslie, amongst whom was Mr. Villars; but his visit was of a very limited nature, the principal object of it being to arrange matters with his sister for meeting his intended bride with her father and sister at Beechwood, where he hoped to conduct its future mistress in the course of a fortnight. The necessary preliminaries being settled, Mr. Villars prosecuted his journey, and arrived

rived at Harwood Park on the evening of the fifth. Miss Harwood was prevailed upon in the course of the following day to promise she would give her hand to Mr. Villars on the ninth.

As Mr. Harwood and Amelia were to accompany the intended bride to Beechwood, the parting appeared in a less formidable light than it would otherwise have done; yet there were many circumstances which presented themselves to the mind of Sophia, which she could not dwell upon without feeling a considerable degree of regret.

Her attachment to local objects was very strong; many of them had been formed in early childhood, and had strengthened as her years increased. Yet these were far from being the principal causes of the dejection which occasionally

casionally hung upon her mind. She was extremely fond of her young sisters and brothers, who had been accustomed to look up to her as to a parent :—if wants were to be supplied, or wrongs redressed, it was to Sophia the little suppliants constantly appealed; and the interest she took in all their concerns endeared her to their young hearts almost beyond expression. She frequently pictured to herself the grief they would feel for her loss : she was assured it would be lively, but she consoled herself with thinking that it would be transient also. Nor did she forget her poor pensioners, to whose various wants she had long been in the habit of contributing. The day previous to the one fixed upon for her marriage, she took from her writing-box the list which contained the names of these poor people ;

people ; and, as she cast her eye over it, could not forbear dwelling on the probability of many chasms being made before she again visited Harwood ; the advanced age of some, and various infirmities of others, justified this prediction. These reflections, together with the thought of what these grateful creatures would feel for her loss, drew a sigh from her heart. In order to relieve her mind by looking forward to changes of a more encouraging nature, she pleased herself with the idea of many improvements being made in her school when she should next visit it. This school Mr. Harwood had allowed Sophia to establish as soon as she had accomplished her fourteenth year, and it consisted of six poor children, whom she maintained, clothed, and educated. The care of these girls, with

with that of her aged pensioners, was now to devolve on Amelia, under the inspection of Mrs. Irvin, who, during the two or three first years of the school being instituted, had assisted Sophia in the management of it. Mr. Harwood saw with infinite satisfaction the very great attention which his daughter paid to this humble but beneficial seminary. Several young persons now in the neighbourhood, by the improvements they had made in such branches of knowledge as were suited to their station, and by their unexceptionable conduct, bore testimony to the plan having been attended with the happiest consequences. During the absence of Amelia, Mrs. Irvin was to take upon herself the entire management of every thing belonging to these departments; an office extremely well

well adapted to her humane disposition. Miss Harwood wished to pay a farewell visit both to her scholars and the cottagers, who had in so many instances experienced the effects of her liberality, and had repeatedly made an attempt to do so : but this attempt struck such a damp to her heart, that she left the task unfinished.

On the day appointed for Miss Harwood's marriage the ceremony took place, which made Mr. Villars the happiest of men ; and about the middle of June he had the felicity of welcoming his beloved Sophia to the habitation which he had endeavoured to improve and embellish in the manner he thought most suited to her taste.

Until this journey took place, Mrs. Villars had never been further south than Westmoreland, nor had she even

penetrated far into this county. Mr. Harwood's great reluctance to leave home had caused his family to be very stationary ; his two eldest sons excepted, who had been at school in the neighbourhood of London upwards of two years. As every object soon became new to Mrs. Villars after quitting her native home, she of course saw much to engage her attention ; but not until she drew near Beechwood did she meet with any thing which particularly excited her surprise : the scenery in many situations was certainly beautiful, yet fell infinitely short of what her native county exhibited. Mr. Villars had intentionally concealed from her knowledge the vicinity of Beechwood to the sea.

About eight o'clock, on a most delightful evening, after travelling for some
time

time on a sheltered road, from which no distant object could be discerned, they suddenly emerged into an open country, when the amazed and enraptured Sophia beheld the vast expanse of ocean extended before her. After contemplating with almost an equal degree of delight and surprise this most interesting and sublime object, she withdrew her eyes for a moment from its serene surface to survey the adjacent country. Her attention was instantly arrested by a very noble though ancient mansion, situated on the summit of a small eminence which rose gradually from the sea, and about three hundred yards distant from it. The lawn which extended from the house to the verge of the ocean was tastefully ornamented on each side with shrubs and young trees, so disposed as to produce the happiest.

happiest effect. Mrs. Villars could not forbear expressing in very warm terms her admiration of this charming place: but how great were her pleasure and surprise when Mr. Villars informed her, with a joy which he could not conceal, that the habitation she saw was her own!

These were happy moments. The delight with which Mr. Villars welcomed her to her future home could only be equalled by that which she felt on becoming mistress of this spacious and noble mansion.

The apartment to which Mr. Villars first conducted his Sophia and her friends commanded a fine view of that world of waters, which for Mrs. Villars had such powerful attractions. The tide had for some time begun to retire, and its soft and undulating waves
broke

broke gently on the shore as they returned to the depths from whence they flowed. As the evening was perfectly serene, and not a cloud obscured the heavens, a more enchanting scene of tranquil beauty than that which presented itself to the view of our travellers could not be conceived: nor was Mrs. Villars easily prevailed upon to quit a spot so interesting, in order to take a survey of the other apartments of which her house consisted.

In about a week after their arrival at Beechwood, Mr. and Mrs. Villars had the pleasure to receive their expected guests, Sir William and Lady Leslie, Miss Reynolds, and her two pupils. During this visit, these young ladies were to be entirely under the care of their favourite governess, a circumstance
which

which contributed in no small degree to render it a happy one.

After spending nearly a fortnight at Beechwood, Sir William and his lady requested permission of their friends to make an excursion to Brighton, where they had engaged to meet a party who were already arrived. To the fulfilment of this promise Mr. and Mrs. Villars could not with propriety object, but were urgent with them to return as soon as suited their convenience and inclination.

In a few days after their departure, Mrs. Villars had the pleasure of welcoming her brothers to Beechwood. It would be needless to remark that this acquisition was also the cause of great joy to Mr. Harwood and Amelia; nor did Mr. Villars receive them with less appearance of friendship and regard.

Miss

Miss Reynolds was quite charmed with the manner and conversation of Mrs. Villars; and this prepossession in her favour soon became heightened into a most sincere and ardent affection. In speaking of her in a letter to a friend, she thus expresses herself:—

“ You will probably think me premature in attempting to sketch the character of Mrs. Villars, until time has afforded me an opportunity of judging, with greater precision than I can be supposed to do at present, of the qualities which belong to the disposition and the heart. But situated as we are here, this is a history which unfolds itself with more openness than could be displayed under any other circumstances. In the different relations of daughter, wife, sister, friend, and mistress of a family, she appears to the
highest

highest possible advantage. You might be acquainted with her for years in London, yet not see half the excellencies which in one fortnight have to me been so apparent. Yet in all places, and at all times, her countenance is so strongly marked with what passes in her mind, that you cannot conceive it possible to err where the characters are so legible, and every look so intelligent. Her varying complexion evinces that she feels all the diffidence natural to youth and a retired education ; yet she possesses such uncommon gracefulness, and the quickness of her feelings is so chastened by complacency, that although it is impossible not to remark her timidity, yet the discovery never gives you pain, nor does it ever approach to any thing like awkwardness. I have several times met with persons .
who

who in a short acquaintance have gained my admiration and respect; but I never met with any one who so soon and so entirely captivated my affections as Mrs. Villars has done.

“ *You* will not I am sure impute this sudden partiality to any romantic propensity; but I am not equally sure that you would not deem a little touch of this animating and inspiring principle an improvement in the structure of my mind; for I am aware that you think me too sedate, too serious: I doubt not but I appear so to many with whom I converse; yet I do not believe you would find one in the circle of your acquaintance who has more enjoyment, though they may have greater appearance of it, than myself.

“ But who would have thought I could thus have slidden into egotism?

The

The easiness of the transition shows but too plainly that the subject is near the heart.

“But before I have done characterizing, I must observe, that I fear it will be impossible for Mrs. Villars to retain that charming simplicity which I so greatly admire, when she becomes familiarized to London manners. It is a great pity she should ever be initiated into scenes which, however alluring they may prove, will not, I am persuaded, conduce to her real happiness or future advantage.”

This account given by Miss Reynolds of Mrs. Villars was exactly conformable to that young lady's real sentiment; but she forbore to mention a defect which she greatly feared threw a shade over the engaging qualities she so much admired; and she considered
that,

that, if on a future acquaintance it appeared her fears were well grounded, it was probable that the deficiency was in consequence of an injudicious education, and not from the natural bent of her disposition. A mind such as Mrs. Villars possessed, so feelingly alive to the claims of duty, friendship, and benevolence, could not, she thought, if properly directed, fail to render to the Giver of all good that most acceptable sacrifice which a grateful and pious mind continually pays to its divine and beneficent Author. Miss Reynolds had repeatedly endeavoured when alone with her friend to give the conversation a serious turn, and one day introduced some observations on the utility and almost unspeakable advantages which flow from cherishing an habitual piety. “If we possessed the secret,”

secret," she added, "of turning every inferior metal into gold, how highly should we prize so valuable an art! Yet are we apt to neglect the cultivation of that sentiment, which, when it has obtained a due influence, refines our less elevated affections, and enriches the mind beyond all calculation."

Mrs. Villars gave a cold assent to what Miss Reynolds, with a great deal of energy, had introduced in the manner which she thought best calculated to engage her attention. But it was not only on this but on every other occasion that her hopes were disappointed: Mrs. Villars was either silent, or returned such an answer to the remarks of her friend as showed that her heart was not touched by the subject.

Miss Reynolds could not avoid reflecting both with surprise and regret, that,

that, possessing a disposition which seemed ever ready to acknowledge itself obliged by the slightest favours received from those about her, Mrs. Villars should appear unconscious of the obligations she was under to that Being whose power protected her, and whose liberal hand continually supplied all her wants. Whilst she lamented this unhappy insensibility to a subject which of all others is the most calculated to awaken our best feelings, she considered it as almost impossible that in a mind so susceptible, and so eminently endowed with every moral virtue, this apathy in one essential point should continue to exist. But how to make the attempt of effecting this important change was the point to be considered. She wished to create an interest before she excited alarm: in
this

this she had not as yet been able to succeed ; yet she thought it would be injudicious to give the subject a terrific aspect, lest fear and disquiet should induce her to shun it as an unwelcome intruder. It was always the wish of Miss Reynolds to allure by gentle means, rather than alarm by threats and denunciations. But whilst she was irresolute *how* to proceed ; in this she was uniformly steady, that nothing in her power should be omitted which was likely to produce the desired effect. But if, in a situation so favourable to the purpose as was the one they were then in, she failed to gain it, how could she expect to be successful when so many obstacles must be encountered as would naturally arise on their removal to London ?

Whilst Miss Reynolds was revolving
these

these things in her mind, Mr. Villars proposed making an excursion into the interior part of the county, which tour would have the charm of novelty at least to attract. The party was too numerous to extend their journey to any great distance, or Mr. Villars would have taken them to Bath, to which celebrated city they were all strangers, Miss Reynolds and himself excepted. Amelia and the Miss Leslie's, as well as the young Harwoods, enjoyed every thing they saw, with all that heart-felt delight so natural to youth, before the fair blossoms of happiness have been checked by the chilling and destructive storms of adversity. Not an object presented itself from which this gay and joyous group were not disposed to extract amusement: with such a disposition

position to be pleased, pleasure is sure to present herself in a variety of forms.

Mr. Villars was so highly gratified with the observations made by the young people, and entered with so much spirit into every thing which excited their curiosity, that instead of returning at the end of four days, as was originally intended, they did not reach Beechwood until seven had expired.

On her arrival at home, Mrs. Villars found a letter from Lady Leslie, acquainting her that Sir William deemed it necessary to return home early in August; consequently their stay in Kent must be shorter than was intended; but they proposed being at Beechwood in a few days, and should claim their promise, as well as that of Mr. Harwood, of accompanying them to
Woodland

Woodland Castle. As no reasonable objection could be made to the fulfilling this engagement, which had been formed several weeks before, merely because the period of its taking place was somewhat earlier than was expected, Sir William and his lady had the satisfaction to find, on a re-union with their friends, a ready conformity to the plan proposed. Accordingly, in the beginning of August the whole party quitted Beechwood, and on the second day after their departure arrived safe at Woodland Castle, which in its situation and appearance had not the smallest resemblance either to Harwood Park or Beechwood. The house had been rebuilt by Sir William's father not many years before his death, and was both magnificent and commodious. The country which surrounded it was

more remarkable for its fertility and culture than any striking features or variety of scenery. That it was populous, there was very soon a convincing evidence. Every day afforded a new scene of festivity and amusement. The neighbouring families seemed to vie with each other in showing every possible mark of attention and respect to the visitors at the Castle. Nothing could exceed the happiness enjoyed by Amelia and her brothers; and every species of pleasure adapted to their ages was introduced to amuse them.

Mr. Harwood could not but feel extremely obliged by this general wish to entertain and gratify his young people, but he began to fear that such constant recreation would be a bad preparative for resuming their former pursuits; and as soon as the vacation expired, no entreaties

treaties could prevail upon him to admit of their visit being protracted. The dreaded day of their departure at length arrived: Mr. Harwood accompanied them to their different places of destination; Lionel to the military academy at Marlow, and William to the school at which he had before been placed near London. Poor Amelia, when she wept whilst she took a reluctant leave of her brothers, felt the additional sorrow of the approaching separation, which must soon place her at such a vast distance from her sister and those friends with whom she had spent so many happy hours.

Too soon did the sad morning arrive that was to witness the distress occasioned by this trying event, which since the loss of her brothers she had so painfully anticipated. She threw

herself into her sister's arms, and, being no longer able to restrain her stifled sobs, wept aloud ; when Sir William, fearing Mrs. Villars's fortitude would be quite overcome, gently disengaged the weeping girl, and as he led her to the carriage endeavoured to soothe her into composure. Mr. Harwood tried to articulate the affecting but concise Adieu which he wished to have taken of his beloved daughter ; but the powers of utterance failed him, and he was obliged to return her tender embrace in silence.

They were no sooner gone, than Mrs. Villars hastened to her dressing-room, and, throwing herself into a chair, relieved her oppressed heart by freely indulging the sorrow she had so long been endeavouring to restrain. By degrees, the kind attentions of her friends

friends and the natural vivacity of her temper obliterated in a great measure the traces of melancholy which this loss had occasioned.

The gay scenes which had taken place at Woodland Castle and its vicinity had been but little favourable to the wishes of Miss Reynolds respecting her friend, to whom she was become more attached as she enjoyed greater opportunities of being indulged with her conversation. There was only one requisite wanting to render Mrs. Villars, in the opinion of this young lady, the most charming character she had ever met with. But, alas! how difficult to bestow that quality as a finish which ought to have superceded every other! Yet Miss Reynolds was far from despairing; some progress she had certainly made, having the satisfaction

faction to find she had excited more attention than when in Kent.

Sir William, Lady Leslie, and Miss Reynolds, were so very urgent with Mrs. Villars to remain in Berkshire during the autumnal season, that at length Mr. Villars consented to return to Beechwood alone, promising that his stay there should be no longer than was absolutely necessary. As Mr. Villars had no house in London, it had for some time been determined that he and Mrs. Villars should make Sir William's their home, until they had an opportunity of purchasing one which was likely to suit them. Mr. Villars had not left Woodland Castle many days before Mrs. Villars caught a violent cold, which all the efforts made use of could not subdue, and at length terminated

terminated in an alarming fever. This afflictive circumstance occasioned the utmost consternation : a messenger was dispatched to Beechwood, and Miss Leslie with her sister and their two infant brothers were sent to some friends in the neighbourhood. Miss Reynolds would gladly have prevailed on Lady Leslie to have quitted the house also, but to this proposition she would not consent. Had there been any doubt of the sincerity and fervour of Miss Reynolds's friendship for Mrs. Villars, the conduct which on this painful occasion that young lady pursued, must entirely have removed all uncertainty as to the strength of her attachment. With the utmost alacrity she took upon herself the office of nurse, and most earnestly requested Lady Leslie not to enter the suite of
rooms

rooms which were near those occupied by Mrs. Villars.

Until the present attack, this lady had been a stranger to sickness : a constitution remarkably good, and the constant use of exercise in the open air, had been the means of her enjoying uninterrupted health. She was not however so greatly deprest as might have been expected, though her disorder was very acute : her spirits still supported her ; and she endeavoured to appear as cheerful as possible, in order that her kind and attentive nurse might not give way to fears, of which her countenance was sometimes expressive, though she was not conscious of their being visible.

If when Mrs. Villars was in perfect health Miss Reynolds felt an earnest desire to impress the mind of her friend
with

with that sense of religion which she deemed so necessary to true enjoyment, it will readily be supposed that in her present situation the solicitude which she felt on this subject must be greatly increased. But how very difficult was the part she had to act ! What without the least hesitation she would have said to her in health, she was now afraid to utter, lest it should imply an apprehension of her danger, and wear the appearance of an exhortation to prepare for a fatal termination of her disorder.

One morning after the physicians had paid a long visit, and Miss Reynolds imagined their looks were discouraging, though they declared there was much greater reason to hope than fear, she sat watching the uneasy and disturbed slumbers of her patient. The foregoing reflections produced in her mind a most

painful conflict. She began to feel that it was her indispensable duty to prepare the mind of her friend for the worst that could happen: she even shuddered with a sort of horror when she considered the vast importance of the subject, and the danger she had already incurred by delay. She felt also, should the dreaded event take place without her having made one effort to lead the thoughts of Mrs. Villars to that kind and compassionate Being, from whom she feared they were too much estranged, that her regret and sorrow would be greater than she should well know how to bear. She was convinced that her remorse would be most bitter. Yet the difficulty of performing this imperious duty made her shrink from the task.

Whilst the thoughts of Miss Reynolds

nolds were in this fluctuating and distressing state, Mrs. Villars became more restless; and as the hour was approaching when the medicine was to be given, Miss Reynolds thought it better to relieve her from the uneasy sensations which seemed to be produced by unquiet sleep; and gently taking her hand which lay extended on the bed, she addressed her in the most soft and soothing manner. But how greatly shocked was this kind and watchful friend, when Mrs. Villars, suddenly raising her head from the pillow with an appearance of great alarm, uttered some wild and incoherent expressions. Miss Reynolds at first thought this might be the effect of disturbed sleep, which had left her mind in a confused state; but this was only a momentary hope, for every look and word too plainly

plainly denoted a derangement of intellect. It was evident that she suffered great distress from some imaginary fears that had taken possession of her mind, with which she seemed to struggle; until, quite exhausted, she expressed herself only in low and indistinct murmurings.

To describe the anguish which Miss Reynolds endured on this painful occasion would be impossible; self-condemnation and heart-felt sorrow almost overpowered her: she sat for some time absorbed in silent grief, when a violent burst of tears roused her from the horrible sort of reverie into which she had been plunged. Mrs. Villars's maid, who had sat in a remote part of the room, whispered Miss Reynolds with an affrighted air, if it would not be proper to acquaint Doctor Mason
with

with the change which had taken place. Miss Reynolds assenting to the proposal, the servant left the room in order to dispatch a messenger to the Doctor.

Mrs. Villars now appeared more composed; and whilst her friend sat anxiously watching the changes in her countenance, she pictured to herself those endearing qualities which had so entirely won her affections:—the delight which Mrs. Villars took in communicating happiness to all around her; the compassion and generosity she showed to the poor; the sweetness and gentleness of her disposition, with the lenity and forbearance which invariably led her to judge favourably of others,—all rose in full view to her imagination. “Will not these virtues,” she mentally exclaimed, “avail much? will they not be dear in the sight of that Being, who
is

is himself all love and benevolence?" And this sweet conviction drew from her eyes the tears of hope and joy, mingled with those of the tenderest regret, and soothing yet exquisite sorrow. Yet again, when she called to mind the awful, impressive, and explicit language of Scripture; when she considered how many requisites were indispensable in forming the character of a true Christian, and what a dreadful censure they incur, who live "as without God in the world," her heart sank within her, and an universal shivering seized her whole frame. Involuntarily she fell upon her knees, and with her whole soul offered up as pure and as fervent a petition as ever reached the throne of mercy; whilst the object for whom these prayers were addressed to the Author of all good, gazed
upon

upon her with a look which showed her to be totally unconscious of what passed before her.

Mrs. Villars continued in this state until the arrival of the Doctor, to whom Miss Reynolds most anxiously applied for his opinion of the change which had taken place since he had paid his last visit. Her fears were somewhat relieved by the answer she received, and hope again took possession of her mind. It was not until late the following morning that Mrs. Villars obtained any rest, or in the least degree recovered from the delirium with which she was seized. But not for one moment did Miss Reynolds quit her bed-side; nor could any entreaties prevail with her to take the refreshment she allowed herself, in any other place than that she occupied by the side of her suffering friend.

friend. At length Mrs. Villars fell into a short but tranquil sleep, and awoke more composed ; and in the course of the next day her senses were perfectly restored. This happy change had but just taken place, when Mr. Villars arrived, who had travelled night and day without intermission until he reached Woodland Castle. From this period Mrs. Villars began to recover, which recovery was greatly accelerated by her youth and good constitution. The gratitude she felt for the unwearied attention paid to her by Miss Reynolds exceeded all expression ; as did the joy which that young lady indulged, when her friend was pronounced out of danger. Alas ! how incompetent are we to judge of what will conduce to our real happiness ! and how frequently do those circumstances which we consider
as

as most essential to our peace, militate against it ! Can there be a more striking lesson than this to teach us resignation, and resolve our will into the will of Him who alone knows what will constitute our real good ?

Miss Reynolds did not fail to take every opportunity of supplying the mental defects of her patient, whilst she so unremittingly endeavoured to restore her bodily strength ; and she had good reason to hope her admonitions would be attended with the wished-for success. Mrs. Villars was far from being insensible to the awakening truths she heard so emphatically enforced and so clearly explained. But, as her health became more established and her spirits restored, these impressions lost somewhat of their fervour, and the renewed scenes of pleasure and dissipation which
took

took place at Woodland Castle had not a tendency to render them permanent.

On Mrs. Villars's first arrival in Berkshire, she had been initiated into the mysteries of card playing; a science to which until then she had been an entire stranger: she entered into it, however, with considerable spirit, and made as much progress as her instructors could reasonably expect. Her knowledge in the art was no doubt facilitated by an increased degree of pleasure being attached to the progress she was daily making: this partiality became so decided as to occasion a slight disappointment, at least, when politeness required her to relinquish her seat at the card-table, or when chance precluded her from making one of the party. Lady Leslie bestowed many encomiums

encomiums on her performances, and also congratulated her on evincing a taste for an amusement which all fashionable people must partake of more or less. Miss Reynolds alone regarded it with concern; but was so well convinced that any interference would be totally useless, as to content herself with carefully avoiding to give Mrs. Villars the least reason to think she approved of her showing such a fondness for what might lead her into inconveniences, when she should be introduced to the society with which she was soon likely to mix.

When the appointed time arrived for going to London, no one but Miss Reynolds left Woodland Castle with regret: for though she had no objection to spend a part of the year in London,

don, yet she could not relinquish the pleasures of the country without reluctance. She also trembled for her friend: the extreme artlessness and simplicity of her character, which exempted her from every species and degree of suspicion that those she conversed with were not what they really appeared, might involve her in difficulties of which she had not the smallest conception, therefore could not guard against: these qualities, joined to a love of pleasure, which there was reason to fear would become too prevalent in the mind of Mrs. Villars, gave Miss Reynolds room to think there was danger in the approaching change. She had, however *some* influence: Mrs. Villars looked up to this young lady, not only as the pattern of all excellence,

lence, but as a friend whom she loved with the most grateful and tender affection.

On their arrival in London, it is natural to suppose that Mrs. Villars entered into the various amusements to which she had been looking forward with some impatience, in a manner that showed how greatly she enjoyed them. Never was there a happier creature; no weariness, no dulness pervaded the feelings of the light-hearted Sophia. The only interruption she met with in this career of pleasure was, the necessity she was under of applying more frequently than she wished to Mr. Villars for the replenishing her card-purse: but she comforted herself with thinking, that by practice she should acquire more judgement.

It was not until the month of March
that

that Mr. Villars purchased a house; and as the two families were to go into Cumberland early in May, a total prohibition was put upon any previous removal.

Amongst those visitors who frequented the house of Sir William Leslie with the greatest degree of intimacy was Lord Robert Vere. He was a young man of fine understanding, graceful person, and elegant manners: he also possessed much general knowledge, a very lively imagination, and great fluency of expression; he had the art of giving to common subjects a degree of interest which nothing could bestow but the ingenuity with which he discussed them. His disposition was open and generous, almost to excess; but impetuous, and unwilling to be restrained. Lord Robert had a taste for polite literature, and when he found the ladies

ladies of Sir William's family at home in a morning, he frequently read to them the works of our most admired authors. As he had a seat in Kent not more than twenty miles from that of Mr. Villars, he could not forbear thinking with considerable regret on the projected journey into Cumberland.

To the great disappointment of Mrs. Villars, Miss Reynolds declined making one of the intended party, having promised Cecilia and Frances to accompany them into Berkshire. At length, however, Sir William and Lady Leslie consented that their daughters should be indulged in the favour of paying this visit; the delighted little girls promising that they would attend with all possible diligence to their lessons. The important words which granted this permission were no sooner pronounced, than they

they caressed their mother with every demonstration of gratitude and joy ; then running almost breathless to Miss Reynolds, imparted the happy tidings in half-formed sentences and the most lively expressions of exquisite delight. As this young lady was before apprized of the agreeable tidings, she was at no loss to account for the abrupt and animated manner in which her pupils entered the apartment where she was sitting.

Miss Reynolds felt almost as much pleasure in quitting the metropolis as did her young companions. Nothing could be more suited to her taste than the journey in prospect, nor could she wish to undertake it with one circumstance changed as to the intended arrangements.

How delicious to Mrs. Villars were those
those

those moments which restored her to the kindest of fathers, and with what exquisite pleasure did she see herself once more surrounded by the dear children she so truly loved! The school, the cottages, were visited with an impatience which showed how much she was still interested in what had formerly engaged so large a share of her time and attention; and the young inhabitants of Harwood were continually pointing out something which they hoped their sister would consider an improvement that had taken place during her absence, or soliciting her notice of objects which reminded them of past pleasures—pleasures so pure, so unmixed, that the recollection of them seemed inexpressibly dear to the heart of Mrs. Villars. But when the fervour of these impressions subsided into tran-

quillity, and the renewal of former scenes became familiar, Mrs. Villars frequently caught herself sighing at the thought of what she had relinquished, and was equally surprised and shocked to find, that in the place which she thought she had preferred to all others, and in the society dearer to her than that of the whole world besides, she not unfrequently felt a languor for which she could not account, and a vacuity which she in vain tried to fill up.

Whilst Mrs. Villars was endeavouring to subdue what she considered as blameable to indulge, she was afraid of investigating the cause of this depression, a depression which she was convinced must be wholly inexcusable: this conviction almost led her to regret that she had ever quitted a spot where she had once enjoyed such uninterrupted

rupted happiness. But when she called to mind the brilliant circles in which she had mixed the last winter, and what were her sentiments on the renewal of the same pleasures, her present enjoyments she was convinced would not atone for the want of those which are only to be found in the glare of public life. Whilst she was obliged to acknowledge this truth, she felt ashamed that it should exist.

After being about three weeks at Harwood, as she was one morning walking in that part of the shrubbery which commands a view of the public road, she saw a servant gallop towards the house, whose livery she immediately knew to be Lord Robert Vere's. As she was certain that this young nobleman had no connexions in the northern part of the kingdom, she was quite at

a loss how to account for so unexpected a circumstance ; not recollecting at the moment that a visit to the Lakes was an excursion sanctioned by fashion, and that a taste for the picturesque was a popular propensity. Mrs. Villars no sooner returned to the house, than the following note was put into her hands by Mr. Villars.

Dear Villars,

As I have travelled thus far to gratify my fondness for contemplating the beauties of nature, which this romantic country so strikingly exhibits, I should deem it an unpardonable offence against friendship, were I to pass so near Harwood Park without informing you of my being in the neighbourhood. Should this note find you at home, and no prior engagement interfere, I purpose
doing

doing myself the honour of dining with Mr. Harwood and Mrs. Villars tomorrow ; to whom, and to the rest of your party, I beg to be suitably and respectfully remembered.

Believe me most truly your friend,

R. VERE.

Mr. Villars returned the most friendly answer possible to this note, the contents of which diffused universal pleasure through the circle of guests assembled at Harwood Park.

Few young men possessed more general esteem and admiration than Lord Robert ; nor was he wholly undeserving of the celebrity he had acquired. Had his generosity been regulated by prudence, his judgement been matured by reflection, and his impetuous temper checked by the calm dictates of reason,
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he would have been a very estimable character. Mr. Villars had shown the same predilection for a lively disposition in the choice of a friend, which had actuated him in that of a wife; for Lord Robert was lively to excess, and so rapid in every thing he undertook, that, without allowing himself time to distinguish between right and wrong, he was frequently hurried into the commission of errors which a little reflection would have led him to avoid.

It would be superfluous to observe that Lord Robert met with a most cordial reception at Harwood Park; his presence soon became so necessary to the ladies, that they declared the plans of amusement which were in contemplation would lose half their attractions if his lordship deserted them. These declarations, combined with the
entreaties

entreaties of the gentlemen, proved irresistible, and Lord Robert very politely expressed the pleasure he should have in making one of the guests at Harwood,—much to the satisfaction of every one there.

When the weather was either too precarious or too warm to leave home, he resumed his accustomed task of reading, or in some way devoted himself to the service of the ladies. The other gentlemen chiefly considered what would be most agreeable to their own inclinations. Lord Robert studied the inclination of others: but this conformity seldom cost him the sacrifice of his wishes; for, in complying with those of his fair friends, he usually gratified his own also. Lord Robert read with great propriety, and not only possessed a fine voice, but the power of modeling

ling it in the most pleasing manner: and if the observations which he made on the subjects which came before him were not always consistent with the strict rules of criticism, they generally evinced an elegant taste and an ingenious imagination.

A month had nearly elapsed since this gentleman's arrival at Harwood Park, when he received a letter from his father, requesting his immediate return home, in terms too urgent not to be instantly complied with. This unexpected summons was a sad interruption to the happy circle which had so long been enlivened by Lord Robert's vivacity. Soon after his departure, Sir William and Lady Leslie began to think more seriously of their return home, but were at length prevailed upon to continue in Cumberland until Mr. Harwood's

wood's two sons should arrive, who were expected early in July.

The numerous and diversified amusements which had lately taken place at Harwood, had almost banished from the mind of Mrs. Villars the recollection of having spent a languid hour. She could not, however, avoid participating in the general regret which the loss of Lord Robert's society occasioned: but this loss was soon most happily supplied by the arrival of Lionel and his brother. The former was so much grown during the last year, and in his appearance and manner so greatly improved, that his friends received many congratulations on the change so obvious to every one who saw him. This promising youth was now in his eighteenth year, and seemed already to be animated with the true and genuine

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spirit

spirit which characterizes a brave soldier. Noble, generous, and ardent, he felt that when once engaged in the glorious service of his country, no difficulty, no danger, would be able to divert his attention from the object in view, or repress the enterprising spirit it was his delight to indulge. Mr. Harwood had frequently observed with concern this early propensity to a military life; but it appeared to be so decidedly his choice, and so entirely interwoven in his disposition, that to conquer it would be a vain attempt, and to oppose it would be both cruel and injudicious.

About the middle of August, Mr. and Mrs. Villars with Lionel Harwood and his brother took their leave of the friends with whom they had enjoyed so much happiness, and who saw them depart with every mark of the most sincere

cere and lively sorrow. This concern they endeavoured to mitigate by looking forward to their next meeting, which Mr. Harwood had promised, if all was well, should be at Beechwood the ensuing summer.

Mr. and Mrs. Villars had not long been settled at home, before their return thither was welcomed by several friends, who contrived to pass a few days at Beechwood in their way to or from watering-places or other pleasurable excursions. Among these visitors was Lord Robert, with whom time passed so swiftly in Kent, that, until he was reminded by letters from his friends of the progress it made, he seemed almost to have forgotten that Cheltenham was the original place of his intended destination. Towards the end of October, Mr. and Mrs. Villars were made
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the happy parents of a fine little girl; and soon after Mrs. Villars's recovery was perfectly established, they took possession of their new house in London, which was fitted up with the utmost elegance and taste. This house, which was spacious and commodious, had the additional recommendation of being situated in the same street and very near that of Sir William Leslie's. Mrs. Villars resumed the mode of life which had been so gratifying to her the preceding winter, with an alacrity which showed how much she valued the pleasures which again solicited her notice: but as she still retained her fondness for domestic enjoyments, Miss Reynolds was not without hope that she might at length feel a preference for what so justly claimed her first and superior regard.

Mrs.

Mrs. Villars did not, like some of her fashionable associates, wish to annihilate the hours that could not be devoted to cards and public places ; nor did she waste the morning in indolence : a part of it was constantly passed in the society of her friend ; nor was she ever unmindful of contributing to the amusement of her husband. Her baby engrossed a large share of her attention ; and when she had leisure to attend to her accustomed employments of reading, writing, music, and drawing, she pursued them with the same pleasure and avidity as formerly.

Thus the winter passed on, the most material events of which, as related to Mrs. Villars, were her bad or good success at play : so great was the ascendancy which this destructive practice had now obtained in a mind which but
a short

a short time before was a total stranger to the inquietudes inseparable from so dangerous a propensity !

Towards the end of the winter, Mrs. Villars had been particularly unfortunate, and had sustained several considerable losses; in consequence of which, Mr. Villars had repeatedly cautioned her, though with great kindness, not to risk such large sums, as he did not think her skill equal to that of the adversaries with whom she usually had to contend. As this did not absolutely amount to a prohibition, the hope of retrieving her losses got the better of the reluctance she felt in acting contrary to the advice and opinion of her husband. This fatal hope was indulged, until its fallacy was proved by a most severe disappointment.

A few weeks previous to the time
appointed

appointed for the family leaving town, Mrs. Villars was spending the evening with a very numerous party at Sir William Leslie's. Fortune this night seemed to smile upon her; and she was pleasing herself with the hope, that the long series of ill luck she had experienced was now at an end, and that she should soon be indemnified for all her losses. But this was a fallacious hope, and only served to render the disappointment which awaited her more bitter. On quitting the card-table, she was extremely shocked to find she had incurred a debt which amounted to a much larger sum than she was possessed of. The idea of again applying to Mr. Villars, after what he had said to her, was so very distressing, that she could not conceal the agitation it occasioned, though she endeavoured as much as possible

possible to assume an appearance of unconcern. There was no friend of Mrs. Villars's near enough to witness this transaction but Lord Robert Vere, who in the gayest manner imaginable told her, it was very happy he could dispose of some of the treasure which Mr. Villars had been accumulating during the evening, and begged she would allow him to hand her a part of the superfluous wealth his friend had amassed. In saying these words, Lord Robert stepped into the adjoining room where Mr. Villars was playing, and instantly returned with the sum required. He then asked if he should order her carriage; which having received permission to do, in handing her to it he entreated her pardon for having taken a liberty which he hoped the friendship that subsisted between them would authorize.

rise. He then acknowledged that he had not applied to Mr. Villars for the money she had just been furnished with, and lamented the necessity he was under of mentioning such a trifle, to prevent the awkwardness of an explanation: then adding, "If you honour me with the regard which I flatter myself I am entitled to from the disinterested friendship I feel for you, you will not bestow one uneasy thought on an affair so very trivial." Then wishing her a good night, the carriage drove off.

Though Mrs. Villars was convinced that it would be highly blameable to conceal this circumstance from the knowledge of her husband, yet the repugnance she felt to disclose it induced her to defer the communication until the next day. The next day brought with it a wish to have an opportunity of
first

first speaking to Lord Robert on the subject. She tried to persuade herself, that in doing this she paid him a compliment which his generous interference might justly lead him to expect. With this opportunity accident soon furnished her, and she lost not a moment in expressing her thanks for his attention; adding in a tremulous voice and an agitated manner, that she was sure that Mr. Villars would take care to return the money in the course of the day.

“Return the money!” exclaimed Lord Robert with an air of much surprise, but still greater disappointment: “is it possible, then, that you thought this paltry affair sufficiently important to give yourself the trouble of mentioning it to Mr. Villars?”—He stopped; and Mrs. Villars blushed still deeper, and appeared still more confused, whilst she

she remained silent and irresolute what answer to return. After Lord Robert had surveyed her for a few moments with real concern, he resumed the conversation by saying, "Surely, my dearest madam, if you have not already put it out of my power to accommodate you with this trifle, you will not bestow upon it one more thought, or allow it to occasion you the smallest additional trouble. Had you the least conception with what delight I should make a thousand sacrifices to oblige you, you would not show a reluctance to indulge me in this trifling instance of proving in some measure the wish I have to serve a friend whose happiness is dear to me as my own."

Before Mrs. Villars had time to reply to this animated address, their tête-à-tête was interrupted, and she was obliged

to appear more collected and at ease, in order to receive morning visitors, than was consistent with the fluctuating state of her mind: she was anxious to do what was right, yet she felt unwilling to hurt the feelings of Lord Robert.

The very warm terms in which this gentleman expressed himself, may probably lead to a supposition of his having some sinister design in view; but if this inference appeared probable, it was also unjust. It is true, his temper was too impetuous, too much inclined to enthusiasm, to admit of moderation; especially when his affections were warmed with the subject in which he was engaged; and that they *were* engaged in whatever related to Mrs. Vil-lars was an undoubted truth. In an early stage of Lord Robert's acquaintance with this lady, he thought her the
only

only woman he had ever seen for whom he *could* have felt so decided a preference as to wish she had been his allotted partner for life. Whenever this thought arose in his mind, he instantly endeavoured to suppress it ; he considered her as the chosen, the happy wife of his friend, and, as such, independent of her own engaging qualities, entitled to every mark of esteem and respect. He felt that he was capable of a friendship pure and disinterested as it was fervent and unalterable. His heart glowed with exulting consciousness whilst he contemplated this refined attachment, and he congratulated himself on being able thus to regulate his feelings in a manner that was conformable to the strictest rules of propriety and the sacred laws of honour.

Having thus determined that every present

sent and every future thought, as well as future action, should be in unison with the plan prescribed ; Lord Robert regarded not only as allowable, but meritorious, to take every possible opportunity of evincing his attachment to the two friends who stood first in his esteem. To see them so happy, was to him, he believed, or wished to believe, a continual source of satisfaction ; and though there *were* moments when he thought Mrs. Villars's merit would have been more justly appreciated, and properly valued, had her husband been of a less easy and quiet temper, he checked this thought as soon as it occurred, for he observed it was generally succeeded by one that was not admissible ; by one that would have pictured to him the world of happiness which the being possessed of such a companion must have

have comprised : compared with this invaluable treasure, how superficial and uninteresting appeared every other enjoyment when put in competition with it ! Little as Lord Robert had been accustomed to control his inclinations in this respect, he was uniform and strict in rendering them subservient to the claims of duty, friendship, and every moral principle. Until he observed Mrs. Villars giving way to a love of dissipation which he thought unsuited to the female character, he considered her as exempt from the failings most incident to the sex. Her fondness for cards, he was convinced, required an immediate check ; nor did he entertain the smallest doubt but that Mr. Villars disapproved of her giving way as she had done to this propensity : yet his extreme partiality for her, joined to the
great

great reluctance he always felt for showing the least degree of displeasure on any occasion, led him to think that he had said but little on the subject. From the sweetness and pliability of Mrs. Villars's disposition, Lord Robert conceived that nothing would be so easy as to wean her from a practice, the danger of which, when properly pointed out, she could not but be sensible of. He lamented that Mr. Villars did not see this matter in the same light with himself; yet it was an affair of too delicate a nature even for friendship to point out.

Lord Robert fell into a profound reverie as these reflections arose in his mind; and was so completely engrossed with the plan of operations which he had formed with such nice precision, that he caught himself wishing it had
been

been his lot to have brought them into action, before he recollected he was transgressing an established rule. There was no harm, however, in pleasing himself with the hope that a continuance of bad luck would produce the same effect which might be expected from gentle reproof and prudent counsel ; and this was his sincere wish : he would have thought *that* money well bestowed which had been expended in so good a cause : he was persuaded, that, could he prevail on Mrs. Villars to consider him as her banker, she would soon sacrifice her inclination, to avoid being guilty of so glaring an impropriety as that of suffering him to continue to supply her with money. Should fortune prove unpropitious, her only resource, therefore, must be an application to her husband whenever her

purse required replenishing. These difficulties he considered as insuperable, and doubted not but eventually they would be the means of deterring her from continuing a practice so dangerous, and apparently so foreign to her general character.

Events, however, proved that his calculations were not perfectly accurate in all respects. He was convinced that Mrs. Villars played with less skill than those possessed who were frequently her opponents: it was therefore reasonable to conclude that the result would not be in her favour, except when chance gave her a considerable advantage. He was therefore surprised one morning, on opening a small packet, to find the sum he had advanced for Mrs. Villars contained in it, and deposited in a very elegant purse, which he
doubted

doubted not was of her own manufacture : the packet was accompanied by a very polite note of thanks.

The being enabled to discharge this debt, which had been the cause of much uneasiness to Mrs. Villars, was a great relief to her mind ; and though she felt very desirous of pursuing the good fortune that had put it in her power to accomplish what she so greatly wished, yet the fear of future inconveniencies determined her to keep out of the way of temptation. She declined all engagements where cards were to form a part of the amusement, and expressed a wish to go into the country as soon as possible.

These precautions secured to Mrs. Villars her restored tranquillity, and she arrived at Beechwood in the happiest state of mind imaginable, where she

was welcomed with sincere pleasure by those families who were ranked amongst the number of her friends. Nor was the joy which her return occasioned confined to the higher classes whose residence was in the vicinity of Beechwood. At an early age she had been instructed in those duties which it is incumbent on the affluent to practise towards their indigent fellow-creatures: the benevolence of her temper rendered the performance of these duties not only easy but delightful. Oh, had she been taught also that she was called to the fulfilment of this important office by views still higher and motives still more powerful than even those of compassion; had she been accustomed to consider religion as the grand object by which she was to regulate her conduct, in how different a path would this

this safe and unerring guide have taught her to tread !

The complacency of temper in which Mrs. Villars returned to Beechwood, and the variety of pleasing objects which every where solicited her notice, led her to hope that the summer would pass over without her experiencing that lassitude and indifference which had pervaded her at Harwood the preceding season. The suavity of her manners and the vivacity of her temper had rendered her an universal favourite : her society was eagerly sought by the neighbouring families. This attention pleased for a short time ; but at length it became fatiguing.

Among other guests, Lord Robert Vere came to pass some weeks at Beechwood. The variety of talent which this young nobleman possessed, and his
exhaustless

exhaustless wish to oblige, banished ennui wherever he appeared. In whatever way the morning was passed, Lord Robert was of the party. Towards the end of summer Sir William and Lady Leslie were expected at Beechwood; but the former having caught a severe cold which was attended with a good deal of fever, their proposed visit was relinquished: the fever was at length subdued, but Sir William's cough still continued inflexible, and the air of Devonshire was strongly recommended. A house at Exmouth being immediately procured, Sir William and Lady Leslie, their two daughters, Miss Reynolds, and Madame Dussaux repaired to it.

This circumstance was the cause of much regret to Mr. and Mrs. Villars. It was not only the concern they felt for the indifferent state of Sir William's health,

health, but the loss they sustained in being deprived of the society of their most valued friends ; of those friends with whom they had a prospect of keeping up a personal intercourse during the approaching winter. Whilst in London, the two families were accustomed to associate with each other in a manner as familiar as though they had all resided under one roof. The difference was therefore very sensibly felt, particularly as Mrs. Villars's situation on her going to town was such as almost confined her to her own house, except taking such exercise as was thought necessary on account of her health. Nor could she divest herself of anxiety on her brother Lionel's account, who about this time was ordered with his regiment to Spain. In about six weeks she received the congratulations

tions of her friends, on the birth of another daughter.

As soon as the health of Mrs. Villars was established, she resumed the mode of life to which she was too partial, with more avidity than was consistent with the sentiments she had expressed some months before. She had now no Miss Reynolds to caution, remonstrate, or applaud.

In the course of a very short period she experienced infinite anxiety from the fluctuating state of her finances, and was frequently very much chagrined by the manner in which Mr. Villars gave her money for the express purpose of play. He did not say much, but it was evident that her conduct was not what he approved. One evening, however, after having made frequent applications for various sums, being
under

under the necessity of renewing her petition, Mr. Villars did not think proper to grant it, without mentioning the concern it gave him to find she had deviated so far from the rules to which he had hoped she would have adhered. It was with some difficulty he conquered the reluctance he always felt to say any thing which bordered on reproof. Mrs. Villars was sensible of this, and sincerely lamented that she should give him cause for so painful an exertion : yet so great was the ascendancy which this unhappy passion had obtained over her, that she had not the resolution to think of relinquishing so favourite a pursuit. But the inquietude she felt for having incurred the displeasure of her husband was not easily to be overcome : it embittered the pleasures of the whole evening ; nor could

the uniform success with which she had played restore her accustomed cheerfulness.

Whilst her head was on her pillow, a thousand times did she form the wish of completing the happiness of the man who idolized her, by entering into a promise of abstaining entirely from cards:—the wish was sincere, but the sacrifice was too great. In vain did Mrs. Villars call to mind the excess of tenderness and affection she was every day receiving the most unequivocal proofs of ; for though her heart swelled with pleasure at the idea of voluntarily conforming to what she knew would be so highly gratifying to her husband, she shrunk with a sort of despondency from the thought of giving up an amusement which was become more dear to her than ever.

In

In this unsettled state of mind, she mixed with a very numerous company the following evening at the house of Lady ——. She took her seat, however, at the card-table more elated than deprest with the vicissitudes she had experienced : this was the impression produced by the events of the preceding evening ; but its duration was transient. After the first hour, every thing went against Mrs. Villars ; yet her enterprising spirit did not forsake her, nor did she take timely warning by submitting to moderate losses, and retiring, before she involved herself in difficulties the magnitude of which soon created serious alarm. She was still impelled to proceed by a sort of desperation, which, if it did not actually supply the place of hope, assisted in keeping alive the almost expiring embers

bers of this bright but sometimes dangerous illusion. As her fears increased, her mind became less collected, and of course she was less equal to the management of her cards. Sensible of this disadvantage, it was a momentary comfort to know that she was secure from the observation of her husband. Mr. Villars was not this evening one of the party, being engaged to dine with some gentlemen at an hotel, but had told Mrs. Villars he should be at home early. Though she derived some consolation from the thought of being immediately exempt from the scrutiny of his inquiring eye, yet the dreaded interview was not disarmed of its terrors: she shuddered with real dismay, and total subversion of courage, at the idea of an explanation which could not long be withheld.

Lord

Lord Robert had been playing the greatest part of the evening at a table so near to that at which Mrs. Villars was placed, that he had an opportunity of learning, from the observations which were occasionally made, how matters went with his fair friend. His attention was at length so engrossed by the above-mentioned circumstance, that to play his own cards became quite irksome, and he resigned his seat as soon as possible, in order to observe without interruption what interested him much more than pursuing the good fortune that seemed to court his acceptance of the offered gifts. Assuming the appearance of an indifferent spectator, Lord Robert watched the varying countenance of Mrs. Villars with extreme anxiety. This lady, finding herself no longer able to support the conflicts
which

which convulsed her whole frame, without betraying her distress, rose from her seat in an agony not to be expressed.

Lord Robert had for a few minutes been leaning on the back of her chair: she turned full upon him her pale face, the features of which were strongly marked with agony.

He gave her his hand to lead her to her carriage. They reached the stairs in silence; when in a voice scarcely articulate she exclaimed, "Oh! Lord Robert, what will become of me! I am the most wretched of all human beings: there lives not on the face of the whole earth a more miserable creature." "My dear Mrs. Villars," he replied, extremely shocked, "what is this you say? But how you tremble! For Heaven's sake compose yourself, and tell me"—"Oh!—I cannot tell you."

you," said the unhappy woman, hastily interrupting him: "You will despise me,—condemn me utterly,—think me below even your pity." "Impossible!" he exclaimed with an energy which he could not suppress; "from my very soul I pity you; I revere, I esteem, I ——" He was going to say, "I adore you!" but a moment's reflection arrested the word before it passed his lips: yet he could not command the feelings which but too faithfully assured him that they accorded with the expressions he dared not utter.

When they reached the hall, Mrs. Villars's agitation was so great that he began to fear she could not be kept from fainting. Lord Robert asked for water: "No, no," she replied: "let me hasten from a place where my blind and infatuated folly has driven me to
the

the very brink of despair :—But whither am I going ?—to a husband whose lenity I have abused, whose patience I have exhausted—Oh ! how my head throbs, and how my heart beats ! Would to Heaven it might beat no more !”

As these words were uttered in a low and indistinct voice, they were heard by no one but Lord Robert ; nor did any eye but his behold the look of anguish which accompanied them.

When orders were given for Mrs. Villars’s carriage to be instantly drawn up, the reply was, that it could not approach without difficulty, but that Lord Robert Vere’s was within a few yards of the door. In a moment almost he placed the wretched Sophia in his chariot. Pale and silent, she sat with her hands clasped, scarcely able to draw her breath.

“ You

“ You are quite unequal to this state of suffering,” said Lord Robert in the tenderest though the most agitated manner : “ I cannot endure to see you thus : the bare apprehension of this dreaded interview will kill you : let me then save from such distress the friend so dear, so inexpressibly dear, to me.” He paused ;—the coachman waited for orders : What an awful, what an important moment ! A few words only were to determine the future fate of Mrs. Villars : too soon was it decided. The fatal orders were given ; and as the carriage moved swiftly along, she was hastening from that home, where alone she could hope to restore the peace which had been so cruelly but so imprudently destroyed.

This unhappy victim imagined that the distress into which she had so incautiously

cautiously plunged herself scarcely admitted of increase. Alas! she was soon to learn, that the sufferings she endured were but like a shadow compared with the substance it resembles, or as the moistening dew to the destructive storm.

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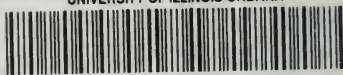
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